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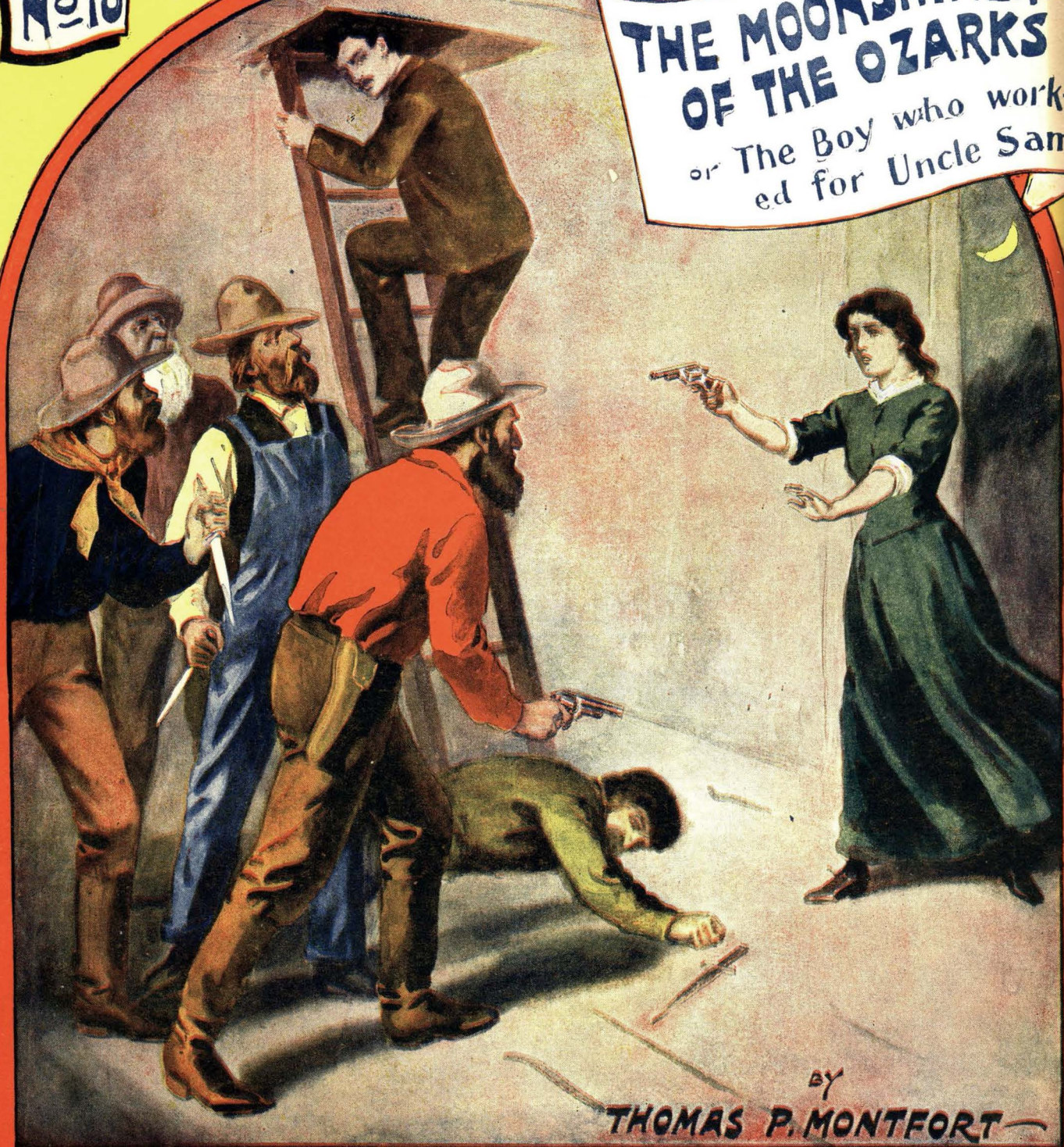
FIVE CENTS

BRAVE AND BOLD

A DIFFERENT COMPLETE STORY EVERY WEEK

No 18

THE MOONSHINERS
OF THE OZARKS
or The Boy who work-
ed for Uncle Sam



BY
THOMAS P. MONTFORT

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THE MOONSHINERS OF THE OZARKS;

OR,

The Boy Who Worked for Uncle Sam.

BY THOMAS P. MONTFORT.

CHAPTER I. "HANDS UP!"

It was late in the afternoon of a beautiful June day, when Jack Marvin reined up his horse on a little "rise" in the path, and looked leisurely around him on every side. After a careful survey of his surroundings he drew a paper from his breast pocket, and scrutinizing it closely for a moment, he muttered half audibly:

"I must be right, but things are different from what I fancied. I expected to find this the most forlorn and God-forsaken spot on the green earth, and instead it is the most romantic and captivating place I ever saw. To be sure the country is rough and broken enough, and it don't appear that there could be anything in the way of civilization within miles of this, but still it would be a pleasure to live and dream away a life in this quiet, secluded nook, where cares and worries surely never come."

Then taking another look around, Jack sat for a short time in a thoughtful attitude, after which he drew himself up with a gesture of sudden and settled resolution.

"Yes, I'm right," he murmured, "and the game is near. I'm ready for action, and the time has come to move with caution."

The speaker was a young man of fine appearance, and somewhere near twenty-five years old. Since early morning he had journeyed by an uncertain and little-used road that led off through the hills and breaks and up into the heart of the Ozark Mountain region. The way was through a wild, secluded section, and the only evidence of civilization that marked his course was the occasional log hut that nestled at the foot of some towering bluff with its little patch of clearing.

These huts were for the most part old and dilapidated, with rough clap-board doors, that rattled and screamed on their wooden hinges, while the front of the buildings were adorned with a large collection of coon and other animal skins, tacked up to dry.

For the greater part of the distance the road wound along the banks of the Meramec River—a clear, shallow stream that flowed down from the innumerable great springs away back in the mountains, which tumbled their waters down the precipitous ravines into the winding course of the river, where they dashed along over the stony, pebbly bottom, whirling, swirling past the great, round, smooth bowlders that lined the way, and now dropping over some miniature waterfall into a foaming, noisy pool below.

Time and again Jack stopped that day to listen to the music of the waters, or to gaze enraptured on the beautiful falls that cast up sprays, glistening like diamonds in the sunlight.

Time and again the road crossed and recrossed the river, and only once, when the towering bluffs approached the river's edge on both sides, had the path left the valley to wind its way among the huge stones that lay, as they had for centuries, along the brow of the hills, half jutting over into space, and seemingly needing but a breath to send them crashing down to the river bed. To a man like Jack, who had spent all his life in the city, this wild, weird scene had an awe-inspiring effect, and more than once as he rode along he was aware of a new feeling in his heart—a feeling of supreme reverence for his Maker.

Since about noon Jack had seen no marks of habitation, and the great, dark forest gave forth the appearance of having never been invaded by man. The road had long since run out into a

mere cattle trail; and as he passed on, mile after mile, this grew less and less distinct.

Several times he stopped in doubt, and once he made up his mind that he was lost. But, after consulting the paper he carried in his pocket, which was a carefully-worded direction, he rode on, until at last he came out on the "rise" where we found him in the beginning.

"Yes, I'm right," he repeated; "there can be no doubt of that. But the question now is, how to proceed. It can be but a little way to the 'nest' of the moonshiners, and I'm liable to run into them at any time; and, as they are naturally suspicious and quick to act, I've got to use the utmost caution. I don't want to make any fool break and get a hole put through me, and I'd like to move just right if I knew how, but it's all in the dark, and I'm most apt to do the very worst thing first. However, I'm into it, and I must do something—take the chances, and hit or miss. But how to proceed?"

Jack dismounted and sat down on a large stone, and in a short time was lost to his surroundings in deep and earnest thought.

The sun slowly crawled down the western sky, leaving the deep-wooded valley in shadow and gloom.

"I've undertaken a difficult task," Jack admitted to himself, when he had pondered the matter over thoroughly. "I've undertaken to ferret out the illicit distillery and bring the moonshiners of the Ozark Mountains to justice, and it's not going to be an easy thing to do. Here I am in their stronghold, far removed from civilization, and without any knowledge of the country, and with not a single person to assist me. I half wish I was out of it; but, as I am not, and cannot be, except by backing out, I shall go on to the end. But how?"

Just then he was aroused by a movement behind him, and in the same moment a voice cried:

"Hold up your hands!"

CHAPTER II.

IN THE HOME OF A MOUNTAINEER.

Jack did as commanded, for one quick glance at the newcomer convinced him that he had no alternative except to obey or die, and he was by no means ready to do the latter.

For a full minute Jack and the mountaineer stood silently gazing into each other's faces, and as they stood thus Jack had time to note the man's make-up and appearance, which was far from prepossessing. He was tall, raw-boned, sharp-featured and awkward. His hair and beard were long and unkempt. His clothing coarse and shabby, consisting of a homespun shirt, home-made pants tucked into the tops of rough, high-legged boots, and a wide-brimmed but much-abused slouch hat. A single suspender, made of bed-ticking, rested over his shoulder, holding his pants well up under his arms, while around his waist was a large leather belt, to the right of which hung a huge pistol at least a foot long. At another time Jack would have laughed outright, such a ludicrous picture his captor made as he stood there holding a shotgun in his hands, leisurely chewing a great quid of "long green" tobacco, and quietly surveying his prisoner from head to foot and from foot to head.

"Well, what do you want, my friend?" Jack asked, at last.

The mountaineer ejected a mouthful of amber, and shifting his weight from one foot to the other, replied:

"I want ter know who yer be the fust thing on ther list, I reckon?"

"I am a stranger here," Jack said.

"Wal, I reckon I know that 'bout's well as ye do. Whut's yer name?"

"Jack Marvin."

"'Tis, eh? Whar yer gwine?"

"Well, I am hardly in a position to say, my friend. Just now that depends a great deal on you. As the candidates say: 'I'm in your hands.'"

"I 'low yer air. What air ye doin' up here?"

"I am waiting your pleasure, at present."

"Say, young feller, don't go ter gittin' too fresh. 'Taint extry healthy. Whut's yer business in these parts?"

"I came up in the mountains to spend a few weeks in hunting."

"Whut sort er game air yer lookin' fer?"

"Oh, anything. I suppose there is plenty of it in these mountains?"

"Yes, I 'low thar's enough, sech as it is; but some uv it's mouty hard ter ketch. Say, don't yer want er good payin' job ter run along o' yer huntin'?"

The mountaineer came a step nearer, and spoke low and earnestly, and there was a candidness in his manner that made it appear improbable that he was not honest in his question.

"I don't know," Jack replied. "What is it?"

Again the man took a step forward, and sinking his voice almost to a whisper, said:

"To spy out the moonshiners."

He was gazing hard into Jack's face, watching like a hawk for any movement or look on the part of the latter that might betray his purpose. Jack was too well trained in his business, however, to be easily thrown off his guard, and not even by the slightest movement did he evince any interest in what the man said. He guessed from the first that the mountaineer was himself a moonshiner, and he was awake to his situation. He reckoned that the mountaineer's proposition was made in the hope of throwing him off his guard, and that he would do or say something to betray himself into the hands of the very men he was seeking. He had dealt with all classes of people, and it required a great deal to disconcert him.

"Wal, what d'yer say?" the mountaineer asked, seeing that Jack was not inclined to speak.

"I don't understand you," Jack said. "Will you be so kind as to explain to me what you mean by moonshiners?"

"Reckon you never heard o' them?"

"It is all new to me, and I think I don't care anything about bothering with them."

"A good many fellers has come up hyar fust an' last to hunt moonshiners, but I reckon they didn't fin' it none too profitable a job."

"What are moonshiners?"

The mountaineer eyed Jack quizzically for a moment, but seeing no expression on the young man's face, save a look of innocent curiosity, he replied:

"Wal, they hain't nothin' as'll be apt ter bother you ef yer let 'em alone, so I'll jest let the matter drap fer the present."

"May I go now? It is getting late, and I must find a place to spend the night. Houses are scarce up here."

"Yas, right skase, sure nuff. Say, I guess yer hain't pertic'lar whar yer stop, so maybe yer'd as well go along o' me. I hain't got much ov er place, an' I 'low yer won't find my grub as good's yer ust to, but I reckon it's 'bout as good as any of 'em's got up in these yere parts. Thar's plenty o' corn bread an' sow belly an' ingens, an' ef er feller's hungry nuff, them hain't ter be sneezed at."

"I accept your offer gratefully," Jack said, trying to make a

virtue of necessity, for he understood the old man's manner too well to doubt the intent of his words.

"Then come erlong," the mountaineer commanded, as he strode away down a narrow cow trail that wound across the little vale, then up the break between two mountain cliffs.

The way was rugged and steep, and Jack almost despaired several times of ever reaching the end with his horse.

As for the native, he swung himself along the rough trail with perfect ease, and when at last they came out to a little clearing near the summit of the mountain, where a small, rickety, old log cabin stood, nestled back against the mountainside, he seemed as pert and chipper as if he had only walked a few steps.

"Reckon yer hain't much ust ter skinnin' up an' down mountains?" he said to his companion, when they halted at the yard fence.

"No; this is my first experience," Jack replied, laughing.

"Pooty rough 'un, too, I jedge yer figger it."

"Yes, a little rough, but I think it must be healthy exercise."

"Wal, this is whar I live. Think yer kin git erlong in sech er place?"

"Oh, I shall find it comfortable enough," and as Jack said this he cast a despairing glance at the cabin and its surroundings, and as he took in the whole scene his heart sank within him.

It was truly anything but an inspiring prospect. The situation was the most gloomy one imaginable, with nothing but towering mountains and deep, dark forests on every side. The old cabin had evidently stood for years, since a portion of the logs of which it was constructed had decayed and let one corner down at least two feet. He noticed that the one small window contained but one pane of glass, the other panes having been replaced with old clothing and an old hat; and he noticed that the shackled old door hung loosely on one wooden hinge, while the front of the building was extensively decorated with numerous coon skins tacked up to dry. It was not a pleasing prospect, but Jack realized that he was in for it, and he knew how to make the best of a bad bargain. So, swallowing his resentment, he put on a cheerful appearance, and followed his host past seven or eight dogs and entered the cabin.

CHAPTER III.

A PRETTY GIRL.

Jack shuddered as he stood for a moment on the threshold of the hut, and cast a searching glance around. It was growing late, and the close little room was veiled in semi-darkness that made its contents appear but dimly. Yet he could see enough to satisfy him that it was a dreary, gloomy den, void of everything calculated to promote either pleasure or comfort.

A smoldering fire burned in the great, deep fireplace, while in one corner sat an old-fashioned cupboard. Over to the back of the room was a bed, and here and there about the house stood a chair or two, a box or two, and other contrivances for seats. In one corner there was a ladder leading to a garret.

The native poked the fire, and in a moment it began to blaze, sending out light and warmth.

"Do you live here alone?" Jack asked, seeing no evidence of any other person anywhere about.

"No, not ezactly," the native replied. "I hev er gal, but she hain't in just now. Reckon mebby she's gone ter mill' over ter Munger's. I hearn 'er say es how she'd layed off ter tote er turn down thar ter-day. It's mouty nigh time she wuz gittin' back, too. Reckon she'll be 'long soon. She'll put up your hoss an' feed 'im when she comes."

"Is she your daughter?"

"Yas."

"Your wife is dead, I suppose?"

"Yas; she wuz took mor'n ten year ago, an' ever sence then me'n Bet hes sorter grubbed 'long here ther best we could."

Just then the two men were disturbed by a noise without, and the mountaineer, rising, remarked:

"Guess Bet has come."

Almost simultaneously the door was pushed open and the girl entered, carrying a bag of meal on her shoulder. As her eyes fell upon the stranger, she stopped for a moment, hesitated, then, as a blush spread over her face, she bowed awkwardly and muttered a salutation.

Jack shrugged his shoulders, and from his manner it was evident that he was disappointed in the girl. His look was a puzzled one, and the expression of his face denoted that she was far from the sort of being he had pictured her out in his thoughts. He had expected to find her a tall, dowdyish, awkward, sharp-featured, ill-bred, masculine woman, perchance bare-headed and bare-footed, with unkempt hair and staring eyes. Instead, he saw before him a plump, rosy-cheeked, blushing girl; poorly dressed, it is true, but neat, with reserved manners and downcast eyes—a being that seemed as much out of place in that cabin and among her surroundings as a diamond would be in a pile of rubbish.

"A pretty girl, by George!" was Jack's mental comment. "And a born lady if ever there was one."

"Bet," Rile Tucker—such was the mountaineer's name—called, as the girl deposited the bag of meal on the floor, "this yere stranger hes come ter spen' ther night 'uth us, an' yer'd best 'tend ter 'is hoss."

"All right, pap, I'll go an' feed 'im," and the girl started toward the door.

"No, I cannot permit it!" Jack exclaimed, coming before her. "Tell me where to put the horse, and where to find the feed, and I'll go myself. I cannot have a lady doing such things for me."

The girl stood irresolute, and gazed wonderingly into the young man's eyes, as if she could not comprehend his meaning. It was the first time anybody had proffered to aid her in anything, and stranger still to her ears was the word lady. It was the first instance of her ever having been addressed as such, and somehow the word had a strange, soothing fascination to her ears as contrasted with the word 'gal.'

As for Tucker, he stood in an attitude of uncertainty, and for the time he probably doubted his hearing; but, as he became satisfied it was no dream, but a reality, he ejaculated:

"A lady! Wal, I'll be gol darned! Say, that's purty darned rich! A lady! Haw, haw, ha-w!"

Jack's eyes flashed with anger and loathing, and he felt an almost irresistible desire to knock the old fellow down and stamp the life out of his worthless carcass. However, realizing his situation, and knowing that he could not afford to gain Tucker's enmity, he restrained himself, and merely said:

"I hope, sir, that you do not consider your daughter anything less than a lady."

"Wal, I reckon I don't, but ladies is somethin' whut we don't hev in these parts. They are all gals and women down here. We hain't much on style, an' ladies is er leetle grain too high up fer us."

"What, in your opinion, is a lady?" Jack asked, with a tinge of contempt in his tones.

"Wal, I dunno es I rightly understand it, but I figger er lady out to be one o' them air women whut don't do nothin' but dress an' play on er pianer, an' ther like."

"We don't agree in our ideas of what constitutes a lady, my

friend, so I'll put my own horse away, and exempt your daughter from that much work that does not belong to her duties."

And Jack went out, leaving father and daughter to digest their astonishment, little dreaming how much his words would affect his future.

"Bet!" the old man called.

"Yes, pap."

"Yer must go over ter Hank Duncan's an' tell 'im I want 'im."

"When?"

"Now—ter-night."

"But it's a good six mile, pap, an' the night jest awful dark, an' yer know what sort o' er road it air."

"I can't help that, Bet. I got ter see Hank ter once, an' I reckon yer kin git thar some way."

"Ef yer say so, I kin try," she replied, with an air of resignation. "Whut must I tell Hank?"

"Tell 'im ter come here airly ter-morry mornin'; I want 'im ter git yere by sun up 'ithout fail."

The girl was ready to go, but hesitated. There was something she wanted to say, but she could not bring herself to speak, and for some time she stood twitching her fingers.

"Whut air ye waitin' fer, Bet?" the old man asked. "Why don't ye go?"

"Pap, is my goin' got anything ter do with that feller out thar?"

"Whut yer mean, gal, by axin' that?"

"Yer know what I mean. Is he a detective?"

"I dunno. That's what I want ter see Hank erbout. He's too much for me, an' though I don't b'leave he'd know, still ef he wuz ter see it, I hain't willin' ter take no chances on 'im. Them chaps is purty slick, an' he may be er spy. I 'low Hank kin tell."

"Then, yer won't do nothin' to 'im?"

"I dunno till I see Hank. Ef he sees fit ter let 'im go, why, it's all right; but ef we think he's liable ter be dangerous, we'll send 'im 'long o' them other chaps whut come foolin' 'round here. We can't erford ter take no chances on nobody."

"Pap"—and the girl's voice was all a-tremble, and strangely soft and earnest—"I wish you'd give up makin' whiskey, git erway from them men up thar, an' leave these here mountains for good. It's er awful thing ter kill off them men the way they do."

"What's got inter yer, gal?" the old man exclaimed. "What put them fool ijecs inter yer head?" Then, without waiting for her to reply, he commanded her to go, and reluctantly she obeyed.

CHAPTER IV.

TERRIBLE PERIL.

Hank Duncan lived away across the mountains, and it was indeed a rough way that led to his house. The road wound up and down gorges, back and forth across the Meramec River, and sometimes along passes so narrow that a horse could with the utmost difficulty pass through between the towering cliff on the one side and the yawning abyss on the other. It was a road that few people would have cared to travel in the bright light of day, and it is no wonder Bet hesitated to attempt it on one of the darkest nights that ever settled down over the earth.

But as much as the girl dreaded the undertaking, there was another and much greater cause for her hesitation. She knew Hank Duncan well, and she knew him to be the leader of the moonshiners of the Ozarks—a man without principle or feeling, whose hands were stained with the blood of more than one of

his fellow-kind. She knew that in Hank Duncan's hands no man's life was safe, and that but a breath of suspicion against a stranger was sufficient to send him to his death. She feared for Jack Marvin, and trembled at the thought of his coming into the power of Hank Duncan and his bloodthirsty gang.

"He must be saved," she thought, as she left the house. "I must go to Duncan's, and I must carry the message that will set the whole pack of 'em on his track; but I must warn him to flee. But how?"

Knowing that her father would be on the watch to see that she departed immediately, and that to go to the barn to warn the stranger would arouse the old man's suspicion, and perhaps bring matters to a terrible climax, she resolved to act differently, and accordingly mounted her pony and started away in a sweeping gallop. As she passed the barn, she kept a sharp lookout for Jack, and seeing him standing near the road, she let her bonnet fall to the ground. As she expected, Jack came at once to give it to her, and as he did so she had occasion to whisper the words:

"Leave here at once—to-night—now! For the sake of your life, go—go!"

Before Jack could utter a word the girl was gone.

A long time he walked up and down the little path that lay between the cabin and the barn, and as he walked he thought. At last, coming to a halt, he clinched his hands and said:

"I'll stay and see the end!"

Re-entering the house, he sat down before the fire, taking care to sit in such a position that the window, the door and the old man were all under his scrutiny.

"It's gittin' 'long in ther night some, an' ef yer feel like lyin' down, yer'll fin' a bed up thar," pointing to the garret. "I 'low yer must be sorter tired an' sleepy?"

"Not particularly. Say, what did you mean by 'moonshiners' when you spoke this evening down there?"

"Don't try to play off ignorance on me, young feller. Reckon yer hain't so green that yer never heerd o' moonshiners."

"I have always lived in the city, my friend, and this being the first time I ever was in the Ozarks, how should I know your meaning? However, it don't matter, for I shall have no time to bother with anything of that sort."

"No, it don't matter now nothin' 'bout that. I guess we'd es well go to bed."

Jack consented, as there was no excuse for sitting up longer, and he could urge no objection to retiring without possibly exciting Tucker's suspicions. Accordingly, not knowing to what fate he was going, he took up a candle and went to the loft, but not to sleep.

He examined his pistols, and found they were properly loaded and ready for use. Then he sat down on the bed to think, after extinguishing the light.

Had his mission in the mountains already been suspected by Tucker, and had he sent the girl to notify the moonshiners of his presence?

He was almost sure that such was the case, for why else should the girl be sent out in such a night, and why had she warned him to flee?

Yes, he was suspected, and the clan were to know of his presence. That much was certain. Then, what would they do?

Had the girl not told him to fly for his life? And was not that a sure indication of what his fate would be if once he was in their hands? Then he knew enough of the history of the clan to understand how lightly they held murder, and that with them it was better that twenty innocent men perish than that one

should go free against whom there was a breath of suspicion that he was a spy.

"I shall expect no mercy," he thought, as he sat there in the dark, waiting and listening for the approach of the men whom he was sure would come before morning. "I shall expect and receive no mercy from the villains, if once they have me in their clutches; but, by the gods! they shall never get their hands on me while there is breath in my body!"

It was a long, tedious wait, there in the quiet and darkness of the night, with no sound to break the stillness, save the monotonous creaking of the old door, or the occasional rattling of the loose board roof.

An hour passed, and he knew that Tucker had not stirred from the corner where he left him.

It was painfully evident to Jack's mind that something was going to happen, and with the probability that his experience with the moonshiners of the Ozarks would soon terminate.

He felt that the crisis was near, and what the end would be he could not conjecture. He could only wait and see; and he had not much longer to wait.

Soon there was a stamping of horses' feet over the road below, then shortly a light tapping at the cabin door. He heard Tucker steal softly across the room, in answer to the knocking. Then one, two, three, four men entered—he counted them as they stepped into the room. Straining his ears and holding his breath, he heard the men engage in a whispered consultation. They talked low, and though he could hear their voices, he was unable to distinguish their words for a long time. It was only the last words of their conversation he understood at all, and they caused his hair to raise and his heart to stand still. They were evidently the words of the leader, and were to be obeyed. These words were:

"He may be all right, an' he mayn't. We hain't no way o' knowin' 'bout it, an' it hain't safe ter take no chances. So I guess we'd es well put 'im outen ther way. That'll be ther safest, an' ther' won't be no mistake."

It was not a pleasant thing for one to sit there and hear his life planned away in that cool, calculating way, and it is no wonder that Jack trembled and quaked in every limb. He was practically in their power, and he had heard enough to know that they were without mercy or feeling. It was truly an unpleasant position to occupy.

"I will fight it out to the end," he said, as he drew his pistols out and crept softly to the head of the stairs. "If to-night is my last on earth, it shall also end the career of at least one of these outlaws and murderers."

Selecting his position, Jack crouched down to await the moment of action. His nerves had become firm and steady; and it is doubtful if the villains below were more cool and collected than he.

Pretty soon there was a movement of feet toward the ladder leading to the loft, and a moment later Jack felt the ladder tremble beneath some one's weight. He crouched lower and waited, hardly daring to breathe. A critical moment of his life had come, and with a cocked pistol in his hand he waited with bated breath and strained nerves for the appearance of the first head above the landing.

CHAPTER V.

SAVED BY A GIRL.

The head that Jack Marvin waited and watched for, with the determination to put a bullet through it at first sight, never appeared above the landing, for at the critical moment, when a

contest between him and his would-be slayer seemed inevitable, the outer door was dashed open, and a second later a pistol shot rang out clear and sharp in the stillness of the night. There was a groan of pain, followed by the dull sound of a falling body, and Jack knew that the man on the ladder had been shot by some one.

For a moment there was a deathlike stillness below, then clear and distinct came these words in a woman's voice:

"This is the way you would murder an innocent man, you black-hearted devils! You have done too much of that sort of work already, and I thank God I got here in time to prevent this. You are a pack of sneaks an' cowards, an' I hope the time'll come when law and justice'll overtake you. I've kept quiet long enough, and never again will I stand by and see you go on with your devilish work, as long as I have the power to lift a hand to prevent it. Now, go from here at once. Go, go, I say, or I shall be tempted to put a bullet through the last one of you!"

Jack listened, filled with wonder and doubt, while the woman spoke.

There was no doubt as to who the woman was, for he recognized her voice at once, and knew that it was none other than Bet. But he was surprised at her boldness and bravery, and doubted if she was sane. Could it be possible, he thought, that such a timid, demure little creature, whose eyes, whose face and whose whole manner spoke of gentleness, could be transformed, so soon, into a human tigress, who defiantly proclaimed the true character of those who surrounded her? Ah, little do we know the depths of some natures and little do we realize to what extent women will sometimes go for the sake of those they love!

"Bet, I don't understan' this sort o' doin's," Tucker said, when he had a little recovered his composure. "Whut d'yer mean by sech talk an' doin's?"

"I'll talk to you, pap," the girl replied, "when these men are gone, but I've got nothing to say to them, only that they'd better go, an' the sooner the better."

"Gal, air ye crazy?"

"No, I'm not crazy. I'm just comin' to my senses."

"You hev done a bold deed, my gal," said one of the men, "an', by ther Eternal, yer got ter answer fer it!" and as the man spoke he advanced a step forward.

"Stop, Hank Duncan, where you are!" the girl cried. "Lay your hand on me and I'll send a bullet through yer heart the next instant!"

Jack, who had crept down the ladder unobserved, saw the girl standing at the opposite side of the room, with her head thrown defiantly up, while her face wore a set, determined look, and her eyes flashed with the fire of defiance. He could hardly reconcile the animated being before him to the docile girl he had seen but a few hours before in that same spot. It was a wonderful transformation, yet there could be no doubt of her identity.

"I give you one minute to leave this house!" she was saying, in a voice that left no room for doubt as to its meaning, "and if you are not gone then, you must take the consequences! Remember, you are warned, and if you don't see fit to heed it and save your lives, it won't be my fault. There's the door. Go!"

There was an earnestness and firmness in her voice and manner that admitted of no doubt of her intentions. Every word went home to those who heard her, and the cowardly villains shrunk away from her as from a consuming fire.

They cast furtive glances at each other as they shuffled toward the door, and not a word was spoken until they had all passed out but Hank Duncan.

Stopping on the threshold, that individual turned back, and in a flash covered the girl with his revolver, as he fairly shrieked:

"D—n you, die!"

In the next instant he was lying on the floor, in a half-unconscious condition.

Jack had sprung forward just in time to save the girl, and, with a blow from his fist, lay the leader of the moonshiners flat on his back.

Hank Duncan's companions, when once outside, lost no time in getting away.

They were arrant cowards, to whom a vision of that defiant girl, with her revolver drawn and finger on trigger, was anything but inspiring.

As for Rile Tucker, he crouched in a corner, daring neither to speak nor move.

In a short time Duncan recovered enough to arise, and immediately took his departure, being accelerated considerably by a good, substantial kick from Jack Marvin.

Jack stood in the door, and listened until the sound of the horses' feet had died out in the distance, in order to assure himself that no treachery would be attempted.

Then, closing the door, he turned and faced the girl. She had thrown the revolver from her, and now stood almost listlessly leaning against the wall.

The heightened color was rapidly receding from her face, and the fire of defiance had died out of her eyes.

The terrible tension on her nerves was relaxed, and the reaction had set in. She wavered, her form reeled, and she would have fallen had not Jack darted forward and caught her in his arms.

CHAPTER VI.

A WARNING.

An hour, probably, passed before the girl became conscious of her surroundings. It was daylight, and when she opened her eyes and looked about the little room, finding everything as she had been accustomed to see it, and heard her father sleeping quietly above her, she could not believe there really had been such a scene there but a few hours before. For a long time she lay thinking over the events of the night, and, though it all came back to her so vividly, she thought it could not be real, but must have been a horrible dream, from first to last.

"Miss Tucker," Jack called, softly.

The girl opened her eyes, and, as she looked up in his face, a sweet smile played about her mouth.

"Then it was not a dream?" she said. "All that really happened last night?"

"Yes, we had a rough time of it last night," replied Jack; "but, thank goodness! we came out of it safely enough. Do you feel better now?"

His voice was so tender, and his tone so full of solicitude and interest, that it acted like a tonic on the girl's nature.

"Yes, I feel better. I guess I must have fainted."

"Poor girl! It was quite enough to set you crazy. All that long ride, and then what followed here. How can I ever repay you for all you have done for me?"

"It wasn't much," she said; "but it was the best I could do."

"You saved my life, and that was enough," Jack said, "to gain my everlasting gratitude; and, come what may, I will never forget it. Though years and distance separate us, I will remember this night, and the brave, noble part you played in it."

He was holding her hand as he spoke, and he felt her tremble. Tears came to her eyes, and for a little while they were both silent. There was a smile on her face that said she was very happy.

"You have been so good to me," she replied, with a slightly

quavering voice, "that I felt like doing something for you, and I am glad I could. You are the first one who has ever spoken kindly to me in all my life since my mother died. You do not know how good a kind word sounds to my ears, and you can't imagine what a life I have lived. Oh, it's horrible, horrible! And I don't believe I can ever go through it again as patiently as I have. Somehow, it never seemed so dark and gloomy before!"

"Isn't he kind?" Jack asked, nodding toward the loft where Tucker slept.

"He's pap," the girl said, sadly, "and I have no right to say anything against him. Only I wish he would go away from here, and get free of that gang that was here last night. They're terrible bad men, and I hate them all. I think pap would leave them if he wasn't afraid. He knows them, and has seen how they treat people they fear, and, if he was to quit them, they'd shoot him down."

"Do they visit punishment on every one who dares to come into the mountains with such promptness as they attempted it on me?"

"I mustn't say too much. It is never safe for a stranger to spend a night here, and you ought to have gone, as I told you. You must not be here when night comes again."

"Do you think they will come back?"

"Yes, they will. They will kill you if you do not go to-day. You'll go, though, won't you?"

"I'll see about that later. First, I must know how you came to reach here when you did last night. You went to notify those men, didn't you?"

"Yes; I went to carry a message to Hank Duncan. Pap sent me, and I had never disobeyed him before, and I was too much of a coward to do it then; and, besides, I had warned you, and I thought you would fly before they came. I reached Duncan's, and told him what pap said, then started back home. It was pitch dark out, and the terriblest road you ever saw, but I got along all right till I came to the pass down beyond the mill. It had been raining a little, and the path was slippery, but I came safely almost to the edge, when my pony slipped and I fell. It was a long time, or, at least, it must have been, before I knew what had happened. I was lying against a large rock, half-conscious that I was not at home, and trying to decide where I was, when I heard voices somewhere near. I waited and listened, and they grew more distinct. Then they passed directly above me, and I knew who they were and where they were going; and the truth of my situation flashed over me, and something seemed to whisper in my ear the words:

"They will kill him—go and save him!" Over and over I heard these words, as if somebody was saying them, and I arose up and climbed back to the road. I staggered forward for a while, little heeding where I stepped. Presently I found my pony, and, mounting, I flew over the road, and, thank Heaven! arrived in time to save you. It all seems like a dream now, and some way I cannot think clearly. Everything is mixed in here," and she laid her hand on her head, "everything that happened after the pony fell."

Then, for the first time, the truth dawned on Jack's mind. The girl, in falling, had struck her head against the stones, and from that moment she had been in a state of wild semi-consciousness.

CHAPTER VII.

OFF FOR THE DOCTOR.

In a short time the girl dropped back into a peaceful slumber, and Jack, rising, stole softly from the room.

The sun was just appearing over the long range of mountains away off to the east, while down in the deep valley, from whence he had come the day before, the birds, seemingly ten thousand in number and a thousand in variety, were making the world alive with song.

When he returned to the cabin, he found Rile Tucker sitting in the corner, smoking his pipe. As Jack entered, the old man glanced up, with a guilty, hang-dog look in his eyes; but, casting his glances quickly down, said nothing. Jack felt a loathing and contempt for the old man, but, realizing the necessity for restraining his ill feeling as far as possible, he accosted his host with a cheery:

"Good-morning, colonel."

"How're ye?" the old man replied, with another sheepish glance.

"Is your daughter still sleeping?"

"Yas, she is. 'Pears sorter quare, someway, that she don't wake up."

"I'm afraid she is pretty badly hurt, my friend."

"Dunno how she could er got hurt."

"Easy enough. Her pony fell with her last night, and her head struck against a rock. I think you ought to get a doctor, if there is one to be had."

"There hain't none nigher'n sixteen mile, an' I reckon I hain't got time ter chase all ther way thar jest for nothin', an', asides, it 'ud cost ten dollars ter fetch ther doc out yere."

"But what is all that to your child's life, man?"

"Oh, reckon they hain't nothin' much the matter ov 'er. Jest sorter dazed er leetle by ther fall, an' I guess she'll soon git over it. 'Tain't no use ter go ter botherin' erroun' an' spendin' money jest fer foolishness. Guess she's jes' er bit dazed, an' er good swig er spirits an' some sorter tea'll fix 'er up all right."

Jack looked at the old man with a feeling of utter disgust, as he sat there calmly smoking his pipe and talking in that cool, calculating way about a matter of such grave importance, and it was with the greatest difficulty he restrained his feelings and retained his calm self-composure.

"After what your daughter has done for me," said Jack, "it is due her that I should render her every service in my power. To her I owe the preservation of my life, and after that I cannot, and will not, allow her to suffer for the want of attention so much needed. I will go and bring a doctor, and I will pay him for his services. Please tell me the name of the doctor you would prefer?"

"I hain't no choice, an', ef yer want ter go, yer kin git whoever ye please. They're all ther same ter me. All I want yer ter do is ter understand that ef yer fetch one yer got ter pay 'im, fer I hain't a-goin' ter pay fer no sech foolishness."

"I shall not expect you to pay for anything I see fit to do," Jack retorted, angrily, turning on his heel.

Going to the bedside, he looked at the sleeping girl. Her slumber was deep and peaceful, but her face was hot and flushed, denoting a rising fever. Taking her hand, he found her pulse rapid and strong.

"Poor girl," he muttered, "it has been a terrible strain on your nerves, if nothing more."

As he spoke, her lips parted in half a smile, and, stooping, he touched his lips to her hot forehead.

He walked softly out, and, saddling his horse, led him forth to begin his journey. As he was about to mount, the old man came out, and called to him:

"Well, what is it?" Jack asked.

"I wanted to know ef you wuz comin' back ag'in?"

Jack, unsuspecting of any hidden purpose there might be in the question, replied immediately and emphatically:

"Certainly, I am coming back."

"I didn't know but maybe you'd conclude to stay away arter what happened last night. I dunno ef it wouldn't be better fer ye to."

"I don't know as to that, Mr. Tucker, but I do know that I am not going to be scared out of here by a gang of murderers."

"Say, I sorter like ye, young feller, an' I don't want yer to think I hed aught ter do with what tuck place, fer I didn't."

"Mr. Tucker, it's useless to add the sin of lying to your other crimes. I know what part you acted in the scenes of last night, and you must not try to mislead me. You are just as deep in the matter as any of the rest. You sent your daughter to notify those men of my presence, and when they came you consented to the murder of an innocent man, and even pointed out to them where I was supposed to be sleeping.

"But I was not asleep, for I 'suspicioned you from the first, and was awake and prepared for the emergency, whatever it might be, and, if the man who stole up the garret ladder last night had come one step farther he would have received a bullet through his devilish brain.

"You need not talk or attempt to excuse yourself, for I am not such a fool that I cannot see through your character from a to izzard."

Having delivered himself of these words, Jack mounted and rode down the trail he had traveled the day before; and, as he rode along, he fell to thinking over all that had transpired during the night, and he wondered if it could really be true that it was but twelve hours ago that he rode along this same path on his way to the Ozark Mountains. It seemed improbable that so much could have happened in so short a time. It all seemed like a dream, yet he knew that since he passed the road he had not slept.

It was a beautiful morning, and all nature seemed alive with gladness. The air was laden with the perfume of wild flowers, while from away down the valley came the sound of the waters over the Meramec Falls. Jack stopped on the last "rise" to listen, and, casting a glance back at the cabin, rode on, little dreaming of what would transpire before he saw it again.

CHAPTER VIII.

HANK DUNCAN.

Jack had been gone an hour, probably, when a horseman rode down the mountain path that led from Munger's mill, and cautiously approaching the cabin, stopped at the yard fence. Tucker, who was sitting in the door, saw the horseman approach, and, recognizing him, shambled out when he came up. The newcomer was none other than Hank Duncan.

"Wal?" Hank said, cautiously.

"They hain't no danger here now," Tucker explained. "Git down."

"'Tain't wuth while, I reckon, Rile. Whar's ther feller we wuz arter? Is he gone?"

"Yas, he went over ter town arter a doctor fer Bet. I wouldn't be er bit s'prised ef she ain't purty bad off. He 'lowed she wuz, an' she does ack mouty quare, somehow. She hain't been able ter git up an' do nothin' yit, an' I hed ter git my own breakfas'. 'Pears right smart an' bad, don't it?"

"I don't keer nothin' fer ther gal, Rile Tucker, curse 'er! I reckon yer hain't fergot a'ready whut she done last night, hev yer? Ef yer hev, look at that hand of Dave Cobbs. Shot clean through, an' now he won't be able ter hol' er pistol fer er month,

ner do nothin' else with it. Curse 'er! I'd 'bout es lief shoot her as him. What did she want'er come in thar fer jest at ther nick o' time ter spile ever'thing? An' now thet he's gone, yer kin jest bet he'll never come till he fetches er gang o' them government dogs with 'im."

"I dunno, Hank, es ter that. He said he wuz comin' back ter-day."

"He did? Wal, I hope he will, for we hain't safe now as long as he breathes. Ef he comes back, he must be put out o' ther way. We've got ter finish 'im."

"D'ye reckon he's raley er spy, Hank?"

"I dunno, an' I don't keer. He knows too much now ter let 'im go. He'll hev ter be finished."

"Pears ter me like es if we wuz er leetle too fast last night. We orter waited erwhile an' been er leetle shorer ov 'im an' his business."

"I 'spect mebbly we acted a grain hasty, but ther safest way is ter be prompt. Anyhow, we've gone too fer to back out."

"Wal, whut air ye goin' ter do 'bout it?"

"I wuz jes' er tryin' ter think whut 'ud be best. He's er fool ef he ever comes back, that's sartin'."

"Yes, I 'low he is."

"Do yer reckon he will come?"

"Yes, I b'lieve he'll come."

"Then, ther best thing fer us ter do is ter waylay 'im on ther road."

"But ther 'doctor'll be with 'im."

"Mebby not; an', ef he is, we kin fix 'im so's he darn't ter say nothin'."

"Yer ther man ter say 'bout sech things," Tucker remarked, with the air of a man who shifts the whole responsibility off his own shoulders. "Yer ther boss, an' whut yer say goes."

For several minutes Duncan was busy with his thoughts; then, looking up, he said:

"Tucker, I'm gittin' er leetle grain s'picious o' you."

"Whut?" Tucker ejaculated. "Yer don't think I'm er goin' wrong, do ye?"

"I dunno, hardly, but it 'pears ter me ye hain't actin' jest squar'."

"Whut hev I done that warn't squar', Hank?"

"Whut did that gal o' yourn do las' night? An' whut did you do in lettin' that feller go away this mornin'? It was your business to 'a' finished 'im."

"Es fer whut ther gal done, I hain't responsible, fer I'd never dreamed o' her doin' sech er thing, no more'n you did, an' es fer lettin' him go erway, I reckon you'd 'a' done it, too. You hain't no more anxious ter git mixed up 'uth bullets ner I am."

"Couldn't yer git the drap on 'im some way?"

"Nary time. He ain't no easy 'un to manage, lemme tell ye; an' now that he's been rile up an' put on his mettle, he ain't goin' ter be catch ersleep, I guess."

"Wal, let that go now. Whut we want is ter be ready fer 'im, an' ef he comes back we'll see ef he gits erway ag'in. What time'll he be back, yer think?"

"'Bout ther middle o' ther evenin', I jedge, though fer that, it's hard ter say."

"Tucker, be mouty keerful how you git off now, fer we've got our eyes sot on you, an' ef yer do one think outen ther way, yer know whut it'll come to. We hain't much on talk, but we're thar when it comes ter business. I 'low you've been with us long ernuff to un'erstand all that?"

"I think I do."

"Then be keerful. We're too fur in the mire now to take any chances on bein' ketched, fer bein' ketched, 'uth us, 'ud

mean hangin'. Be keerful and walk straight, or we'll come ter see ye on er leetle matter o' pressin' business."

With that, Duncan rode away as he had come, leaving Tucker to ponder over his words of warning.

Rile Tucker was as base a coward as ever lived, and a great deal less of an outlaw than a vagrant.

He had chosen his present method of living not because of any special liking for it, but because it was the most convenient. He had drifted into the Ozark Mountains through accident, and he had remained there because no accident or other thing had forced him out of them. Indolence forbade him doing aught of his own volition, if, indeed, he had any volition. He was too shiftless to think or plan, and where he dropped, there he remained as long as no separate influence or power moved him.

So, dropping down in the Ozark Mountains years before, he had remained there. And, after all, it was a fitting place for him, for nowhere in the wide world can one live with less exertion and less labor. Securing a little spot of ground on which to squat, Rile Tucker proceeded to make himself at home.

A little, one-room log cabin was erected, or, rather, thrown together; a little spot, consisting of a few scant acres, was cleared off and fenced, and there the improvements ended. Rile seemed so overdone and fatigued with that much work that he had never since recovered sufficiently to feel equal to the task of attempting more.

As the years drifted by, he became associated with the moonshiners, and, though he was fully in their confidence, he was never looked upon by them as anything more than a tool to do their bidding.

He knew of their schemes and their bloody deeds of butchery, but he never participated in their work farther than as an accessory. He had never taken a life, though he had often enough acquiesced in it, but it is doubtful if he did this more through fear of his comrades or indolence on his own part.

Bet had awakened from her long sleep, and when Tucker came in he found her staring about the room, with a searching look. Her face was still flushed, but it was evident her fever was going down.

"How do yer feel, Bet?" Tucker asked, in anything but kind tones.

"I feel terrible weak, pap," the girl replied. "What time is it?"

"'Bout 'leven, I guess. Can't ye git up?"

"No; I wish I could. Had you any breakfast?"

"I had a bite I fixed up myse'f. D'yer want sumpin'?"

"There ain't anything I could eat."

"Thar's some cold bread from last night an' a piece o' fried bacon. Could yer eat some o' that?"

The girl shook her head.

"Wal, ye'll hev ter eat somethin', gal, an' they hain't no use er gittin' pertic'lar 'bout it. Reckon that's all ther sort o' grub yer likely ter git. Better try a leetle mite ov it."

"I can't swallow, pap. Maybe I may eat it after a while. Where did ther stranger go?"

"He went ter town arter a doctor fer ye, though I told 'im they warn't no sense in it. He ergreed ter foot ther bill hisse'f, though, an' arter that I gin in to it."

"Is he comin' back?"

"Reckon so."

"Did he say he was?"

"Yas."

"I wish he wouldn't."

"So do I wush it, but ther durned fool don't seem ter hev no sense. He'll jest hang 'round here till he gits us all inter b'ilin' water, pervided he hain't got away with. I'm awful sorry yer

got hurt, fer that corn needs a hoein', an' yer arter be in it now, stid o' lyin' here abed. Reckon ye kin hoe it ter-morry?"

"I'm afraid not. I feel awful weak, and my head's so queer."

"Mebby ef yer'd git up an' knock erbout some it 'ud kin' er wear off."

"I tried to get up a while ago, but I couldn't do it."

"Shucks, but that's bad."

The old man went over to the chimney-piece, and, taking down his pipe, filled it with tobacco, lighted it, and sat down in the door to smoke, resigning himself as best he could to his cruel situation.

An hour, probably, went by; then, getting up, he went across the room, took down his gun, and, throwing it over his shoulder, started out.

"Where are you goin', pap?" Bet asked.

"Goin' huntin'."

"I wish you would fetch me a drink from the spring before you go."

"I hain't got time; an', asides, thar's water here that wuz fotch yisterday."

"But it's warm, and I want some that's cool."

"Oh, yer too perticklar. That's good ernuff."

And, with that, the old man strode out, and, calling the dogs, disappeared in the woods.

It was a long, long evening to the poor, sick girl, who lay there all alone, with nothing to do, nothing to engage her attention, save the horrid scene of the last night, and of the stranger who had so briefly crossed her life, but whose image was fixed indelibly on her mind.

"Where," she asked herself, "was he now? And would he ever come back?"

CHAPTER IX.

A NEW ACQUAINTANCE.

Arriving at his destination after a tedious and necessarily slow ride, Jack began his search for a physician. There were but three in the place, he soon discovered, and the first of these to whom he applied was himself sick and unable to make the journey; the second was away on a visit, and would not be back before night; and the third and last had a call to make, and could not go to Tucker's until some time in the afternoon.

Jack was vexed at this announcement, and used every means to induce the doctor to go at once.

"It is a serious case," Jack urged, "and should have immediate attention. A life may depend on your promptness. Surely, you cannot delay under such circumstances?"

"I am compelled to, my young friend," the doctor replied; "but, as I must go to the other patient—who, by the way, is in an equally critical condition—I cannot go with you now. I wish I could be in two places at once, but, that being impossible, the best I can do is to hurry to the one, and afterward go with you; or, if you prefer, come after you. Perhaps you will not care to wait?"

"Not if it is unnecessary. But can you find the way, doctor?"

"Oh, yes. I have been up in the mountains frequently. You need have no fears of that."

"Then I shall not wait. But, before I go, I will pay you the fee. Here—is that enough?" and Jack threw out a ten-dollar bill.

"Plenty," the doctor replied; "but I do not expect my fee in advance."

"That's all right," Jack said, as he arose to go. "Now, do

your best to get there as soon as possible, for I fear the girl is dangerously hurt."

"I will not lose a moment," and the doctor gathered up his medicine case, and bustled away with the air of one who proposed to keep his promises to the last letter.

Having settled this point, Jack walked back down one of the business streets of the little town, and, entering a small grocery store, selected from the tumbled and ragged contents a few delicacies such as he thought the girl might like.

This accomplished, he secured his own breakfast, and, remounting once again, turned his horse's head toward the heart of the Ozark Mountains.

All at once the question that Tucker had asked him at parting came back, and with a meaning he had not before placed upon it.

He stopped his horse as the true import of the question flashed over him.

"Yes, I see it now," he said. "He had a purpose in asking if I was coming back, and stupid fool that I was, I told him yes. Now, I shall find them prepared to receive me, or, perchance, waylay me on the road. I think I must have lost my wits, and it is high time I was recovering them. What had I better do? Turn back? Never! I have settled that point, once and for all, and from henceforth I shall consider it no more. I might wait for the doctor. But would that do any good? Would his presence prevent their carrying out their plans? And, besides, would they not as readily dispose of him, too, if he was in their way? No, that would be useless."

So there was nothing left but to go on.

Passing over a few more miles, he approached the mountain pass, and, as he came around a short bend in the road, he came face to face with a horseman.

Jack stopped short, and, placing his hand on his pistol, waited for the other to speak or act, as he felt inclined.

The other man was a tall, limber-looking specimen of backwoods life, in his shirt sleeves, and wearing a great, wide-brimmed straw hat.

His hair hung away down over his shoulders, and his face had the appearance of having been mowed rather than shaved.

A good-natured smile, or, rather, grin, broke over his features as for almost a full minute he stood there silently eying the man before him.

At last, seeing that the other was making no effort to speak, he relaxed his grin, and drawled out the word:

"How're ye?"

"I'm pretty well," Jack replied. "How are you?"

"Oh, fust-rate. Hain't no call to grumble. Whar yer goin'?"

"Up to the mountains."

"Ever been up thar?"

"Yes."

"Summat erquainted, then?"

"Yes, slightly."

"Know Hank Duncan, er any o' thet set?"

"No, I can't say that I do."

"I didn't know but mebby ye did."

"Do you know Mr. Duncan?"

"Wal, I can't say that I know him the best in the worl', but I know 'im ernuff, I reckon. It hain't best to know some folks too well."

"I suppose not. What sort of a man is he?"

"Looky yere, stranger, it ain't safe ter do too much talkin' in these yere parts, and a feller hes ter be a leetle keerful o' how he speaks. Gotter sort o' watch 'is tongue, yer know. But, seein'

's I know what yer arter an' who ye air, I don't mind talkin' ter you."

"How does it happen that you know me and my business?" Jack asked, with a tinge of suspicion in his voice. "You never saw me before, and I'm at a loss to account for your words, unless—" and here he checked himself, abruptly.

"Unless whut?" the other asked, eying Jack askance.

"Never mind that. Answer my question, if you please."

"Wal, now, whut wuz it ye axed?" he asked, with provoking calmness and deliberation.

"I asked how it came that you knew me and my business?"

"Yas, I rickermember now. Wal, the fack is, I hain't never seed ye afore, an' I dunno yer from Adam, but I've lived in these yere parts long enuff ter know who all these fellers is that comes up yere, an' what it is as fotches 'em, an' I reckon ef I wuz ter say yer wuz er detective I wouldn't miss it none, an' ef I wuz ter say yer business wuz ter spy out them darned moonshiners, I 'low I'd about hit it."

"Do you think so?" Jack replied, somewhat reassured that the man before him was not one of the crowd who had visited him the night before.

"Yas, I know. Shucks! I kin tell 'em quick's I set eyes on 'em. Say, ef I wuz you I'd go back. It's pesky resky business, an' them durned scamps is jes' nachully pizen to anybody they s'picion. Tell yer whut, I don't wunt no truck 'uth 'em. They don't think no more of killin' er man ner they would er killin' er dawg. There's been er good many fellers gone up thar as hain't never come out ag'in."

Jack had little, if any, doubt of the man's honesty, for his face and voice spoke of it in unmistakable terms. There was nothing of the sneak about his appearance, but, on the contrary, he seemed to be a good-natured, well-meaning, honorable, generous sort of man, a trifle shiftless and easy-going, withal.

"Where do you live, my friend?" Jack inquired.

"Up the crick a piece."

"What is your name?"

"Perry Jackson."

"Say, I am up here on a little hunting expedition."

"Yas, I un'erstand, but don't matter 'bout that now."

"Don't matter about what?"

"Why, 'bout ther sorter game yer huntin'. Go on 'uth yer say."

"Well, I am here for a short spell of hunting, and I want a place to stop. Now, what I was going to ask is, could you let me stop at your house?"

"Wal, we hain't nowise fixed fer keepin' people, but ef yer kin stan' us, I reckon we kin stan' you. Ef yer willin' ter try it, come erlong. 'Tain't much I hev ter offer, but sech as it is goes free."

"Well, I have to go up in the mountains to-night, but to-morrow I will come."

"Jest es ye say, mister. Reckon yer know yer own business. When yer git ready ter come, jest foller up this path erbout er mile, an' yer'll fin' us. Good-by."

The native rode on, while Jack remained a short time looking after him.

"There is a whole-souled, happy-go-lucky, honest son of the forest," he thought, when the man broke out into rude, disconnected song, that was noisy if not melodious.

Jack rode up the mountain path, and had almost reached the top, when four men stepped out of the bushes, with drawn revolvers.

"We hev yer now," one of them said, "an' yer end hes come!"

And, cocking his revolver, he leveled it at Jack's head.

CHAPTER X.

A CLOSE SHAVE.

The attack, while not altogether unexpected, was so sudden and well-timed as to leave Jack entirely at the mercy of his assailants. Before he could place his hand on his pistol, four drawn revolvers were pointed directly at his head, and the actions and the looks of the men told him they meant no foolishness. He saw at a glance that he was completely in their power, and that to attempt resistance would be sheer nonsense.

"We have ketched you, and darn ye, yer got ter 'go!" the leader repeated.

"Go where?" Jack asked.

"Go to ther devil, whar yer rightly belong. We're gwine to kill ye, don't yer un'erstand?"

"Kill me! What for? What have I done to you or against you?"

"'Tain't so much whut yer hev done es whut yer want ter do. Young feller, we hain't no pack o' darned ijiots up hyar in these mountings, ef we ain't seed much o' ther world. Leastwise, we hain't sich fools that we don't know whut fotched ye up in these yere parts; an' lemme tell ye, thar mayn't be no other business yer could git in so much ter yer taste as huntin' moonshiners, but thar's other things as is er blamed sight more agreeable fer er feller's health."

"Why do you think I'm hunting moonshiners, my friends?"

"Huh, why do we know we're a-livin'? Why do we know anything? Jes' kase we hain't no blamed fools. Reckon we hain't never seed none o' them darned spies? Reckon they hain't never none o' 'em come up here afore? Wal, I reckon ef yer figger it out that er way yer figger it mouty wrong. Thar's been plenty o' them up hyar fust an' last, but ther wuz er pesky sight less ov 'em went out o' ther mountings than thar wuz that come in."

"What became of them?" Jack asked, more to gain time than anything else, for he but too well surmised what their doom had been and what his was to be in a short time.

"Whut went with 'em? Wal, they died, mister. They didn't find it none too healthy hyar, lemme tell ye. But that hain't hyar nor thar. Air ye ready to go?" and, as the man spoke, he raised his pistol and squinted along the barrel as coolly as if he was aiming at a tree.

Jack realized that it was useless to parley, for the looks of the men proclaimed that they were in earnest, and that no argument or plea could turn them from their purpose.

As he glanced from face to face, the terribleness of his position flashed over him in all its force, and, forgetting all of the present, his thoughts flew back to his home and friends, who would mourn his loss without ever suspecting his fate. And it is strange that in that one brief moment, when only the nearest and dearest objects found their way to his thoughts, that Bet should be there more vividly and more dearly than any other.

"Air ye ready?" the mountaineer asked again, holding his pistol in range with Jack's head.

Jack never answered that question, for at that moment there was an awful, crashing sound above them, as if the whole mountain top had torn loose and was rushing with lightning speed to the valley below.

They all glanced up at the first sound, and their faces grew white with fear and astonishment; Hank Duncan, forgetting

his prisoner and everything else, let his pistol fall to his side, while he stood gazing upward with wide, wild eyes.

On—on, crashing its way through the trees, riding down small saplings as so many straws, the great rock of perhaps a thousand tons came at a speed that was terrible, directly toward the men who were below.

Hank Duncan and his comrades waited no longer.

Forgetting their mission, perhaps totally unmindful of the existence of Jack, they took to their heels, and flew down the road as if an avenging Nemesis was after them. Jack was no less hasty in making his escape, and, putting the spurs to his horse, he dashed away in the opposite direction.

Jack did not stop to see where the stone found a lodgment, but as he galloped on he heard it crashing its way through the timber away down the mountainside, and, as he listened, he muttered:

"Luckily for me you lost your balance when you did, for your presence at that moment saved my life."

It was, indeed, an opportune event for Jack, for, had the great stone been delayed but a moment in its descent, his life would have been gone, for Hank Duncan's finger was already on the trigger of his pistol, and but a second would have sufficed for him to have sent a bullet through Jack Marvin's brain.

"Fate or Providence has interfered twice to save my life within twenty-four hours," Jack mused, as he scrambled up the mountain toward Rile Tucker's cabin; "but that power will not always be mindful of me, and from this on I must be more careful to guard my own life."

CHAPTER XI.

A TALK WITH TUCKER.

Dismounting, Jack cautiously approached the cabin, the door of which stood open. He did not particularly fear Tucker, but yet, after the experiences of the last few hours, he began to be wary, and he felt that it was time to use discretion, at least. These mountaineers, he discovered, were a hard lot to deal with, and it was doubtful, he thought, if any of them could be safely trusted. He decided that Tucker was not really bad, and, if left to himself, no harm was to be feared from him. But now he felt differently, and resolved that no man should get "the drop" on him again.

Stopping at the door, he peered anxiously into the room and around. A deathlike stillness prevailed. Going in, he stealthily approached the bedside where Bet lay. She was asleep, but her slumber was so light that his approach, though noiseless, attracted her attention, and she opened her eyes as he stooped over her.

For some time Jack sat beside her, talking quietly to her.

Two hours passed, and then suddenly there came the clatter of horses' feet along the road.

Jack sprang up, and, drawing his pistol, went to the door to see who approached.

One glance reassured him, for he saw that it was only the doctor. Turning back, he remarked:

"The doctor is here, and your father will be back soon, so I had as well prepare to go."

"Where?" the girl asked.

"Down in the valley somewhere. I shall try to find a more hospitable roof to stop under. I hate to leave you, but of course I cannot think of remaining here any longer."

"No; you must go, but I wish you would give up the project and leave the mountains for good."

"I can't do that without turning coward, and I won't turn

coward and fly at the beginning of the task. But rest easy, for I know enough of these people now not to be so easily led into their power."

After hearing the doctor's decision, and learning that Bet was not seriously hurt, he bid her good-by, and, mounting his horse, rode away.

Proceeding with great caution, and with his hand on his pistol, ready to fire on a second's notice, Jack at last reached the scene of the late encounter, and stopped for a moment to view the ground.

It was truly a wonderful sight.

The massive stone, in its lightning speed down the mountain, had leveled everything before it. Lesser stones were crushed to pieces or driven into the earth, stumps and trees were uprooted or mashed out of shape, while smaller obstacles were blotted out of existence. From the summit of the mountain to the base a track was cut out as clear and clean as could have been done by the hand of man.

As Jack remained gazing up at the summit of the mountain, where a long line of huge bowlders lay, seemingly needing but a touch to send them crashing down the way the one had gone, his attention was attracted by a noise below him, and, whirling about with drawn revolver, he stood face to face with Rile Tucker.

"Yer got the drap on me, stranger," Rile Tucker said, with a broad grin; "but yer mout es well put up yer gun. I hain't tryin' ter hunt ye. Ef I hed er wanted to, I would er done it afore this. Jes' put down yer gun, will ye? It hain't pleasant ter hev it p'inted at er feller that air way."

"No, you don't come it over me that way, old man. In this section, the man that's quickest has the best chance for his life, I find, and; since I have you safe, I'll just hold you so."

"Say, young feller, yer off in yer cackilations-ef yer figger out that I'm wantin' ter hurt ye. I hain't never wanted ter hurt ye from the fust."

"That's easy enough said, but it's a little hard to believe, after all that took place last night and to-day."

"Wal, I 'low things do 'pear er right smart'n ergin' me. But er feller hes ter sorter look out fer hissel' in this here kentry, an' them derned cusses up thar is wuss 'an pizen when they git arter er chap. They've already 'gun ter 'spicion me."

"Why do they suspicion you? It appears to me that you have played into their hands as faithfully as they could wish. Don't try to palaver me with any of your lies, for it won't do any good. If you had a chance you'd shoot me in a minute."

"Say, yer off thar. I wouldn't hurt ye fer nothin'. I sw'ar it!"

"Well, it may be so, but I'm not willing to chance you. I'm not going to hurt you if you go along straight, but I'll keep you under my eye, just the same."

"Wal, be er mite keerful 'uth that doggone gun. It don't look rale purty from this 'ere end."

"Move on, then."

"All right. Say, hes the doc come yit?"

"Yes, he's up there now, and you'd better get along and take some care of the poor girl. What did you want to go off and leave her this way for?"

"Reckon I couldn't ha' done nothin' fer 'er ef I'd stayed. Is she pooty bad hurt?"

"No, I think not."

"I'm monstrous glad o' that. I tell ye, I hated it powerful ter hev 'er lain up jes' now with ther crap in ther grass. Reckon she kin hoe ter-morry in ther new groun'?"

For a full minute Jack eyed the old man almost viciously.

"Say, I have a great notion to shoot ye," Jack said. "A great,

lubberly, lazy, good-for-nothing, awkward rascal, loping around over the woods day after day, while that girl is made to do your work! You ought to be ashamed to show your face!"

"Sho; yer make er awful fuss 'bout nothin'. I reckon it don't hurt tfer gal none. It jes' make 'er healthy."

"Why don't you send the girl away? Don't you know it's no fit place for her here in the society of all those thieves and cut-throats?"

"Sho; I jedge she's doin' well ernuff, an' es fer that, whar'd I send 'er?"

"Have you no relatives you could send 'er to?"

"Reckon not. Leastwise, I dunno whar none ov 'em air."

"Can't you find out where they are?"

"Oh, I mout, but it 'ud be er right smart o' trouble, an' I reckon we won't bother 'uth it. Es long es I live, we'll do well ernuff; an' ef I wuz ter die, I guess she'll git erlong somehow. Say, whar ye gwine?"

"I'm leaving the mountains."

"Air, eh? Wal, I'm dinged glad ov it. Say, mister, I wush yer'd be'leve me when I say I'm not standin' out ergin ye. I wouldn't tech er ha'r o' yer head ef I could. I ackly wouldn't fer nothin' er tall."

"Well, I won't dispute you, Tucker, but I'm not ready just now to take much stock in your honesty. However, the time may come when you'll have a chance to prove the truth or falseness of your words."

"Whut? Yer hain't figgerin' on comin' back to these parts ergin, be yer?"

"I'm not figuring on anything very far in the future just now. We may meet somewhere again, you know."

"Sartinly, sartinly, we mout, that's so. But I reckon we hain't likely ter fer a spell."

"Probably not; we can't tell what is liable to happen. Go on home now, and act a little more like a man toward your daughter."

"All right, I'll be er goin'. Say, didn't that thar stun shoot down hyar pooty darned lively, though?"

"Did you see it?"

"I mout 'a' seed it, mebbey."

"Where were you?"

"Oh, I wan't fer off, I reckon."

"Were you up above or down below?"

"I wan't below, yer kin jes' bet."

"Look here, old man, did you have anything to do with that stone rolling down the mountain?"

"I hain't sed I hed, hev I?"

"No, you haven't said you had, but your talk seems a little suspicious. Did you have anything to do with it?"

"Stranger, I hain't a-sayin' too much 'bout that thar stun, but I'd bet er sheepskin she didn't roll down thar by 'erse'f. Guess mebbe somebody guv 'er a leetle tilt. Don't take much ter throw 'em off whar they're——"

Just at that moment there came the report of four or five shots in rapid succession, followed soon after by the clatter of horses' hoofs down the road.

The two men looked at each other in mutual wonder, and neither moved nor spoke.

CHAPTER XII.

BACK TO JACKSON'S.

Jack was the first to break the silence, which he did by asking: "What's that?"

"Dunno," Tucker replied, "less'n them devils is arter some

feller. Wouldn't be er grain s'prised ef they hain't arter the doc. Mebbey they mistuck 'im fer you."

The clatter of the horses' feet came nearer, and a second later the doctor came tearing around a bend in the path.

Jack understood his own danger in a twinkling, and whirling his horse about clattered off down the mountains several yards in advance of the doctor.

It was a wild race against the assassins' bullets, and over a road thick-set with abrupt turns and bowlders; but Jack did not stop to consider danger from that source, but sped on at the utmost speed, with the doctor coming close after.

At last the valley was reached, and he halted till the doctor came up.

They had passed over a mile of road, and the firing having long since ceased, it was evident that the moonshiners had given up the pursuit.

"Well, are you safe and sound?" Jack asked.

"Yes, I think so," the doctor answered; "but it was a close call. Those bullets whistled around pretty lively, and I think some of them must have cut my clothing."

Jack examined the doctor's clothing, and he found that a shot had cut through the back of his coat.

"That was getting pretty close to you, my friend," Jack remarked.

"A little too close for comfort, I can tell you. But what the devil does such things mean?"

"It means that there is a gang of moonshiners, outlaws and cutthroats in these mountains who seem set on killing every stranger that comes among them."

"What have you to do with them?"

"My experience with them has been somewhat similar to yours, only a great deal more extensive."

And Jack told the whole story of his short but extremely lively experience with the moonshiners of the Ozarks.

"The devil!" the doctor ejaculated. "Is it possible such things are carried on right here within a few miles of a civilized community and nothing is done to repress the scoundrels and their nefarious work? Why, sir, it's enough to shame every law-abiding citizen in the State, and immediate steps ought to be taken to bring the villains to justice. It's a shame, sir, a burning shame."

"That's all very well said, doctor, but it's not as easy to accomplish so desirable a purpose as it is to plan it. I think all the natives of the mountains are in the gang, and the only way to suppress them would be to locate their stronghold and wait and watch for an opportunity to trap the whole gang at once."

"Possibly you are correct. That, I suppose, would be the work of a shrewd detective."

"Yes, I think so."

"Well, are you going on to town?"

"No, not at present."

"You surely don't intend to spend another night up here?"

"Yes; I have an appointment with a gentleman a mile up the river, and I shall spend the night with him."

"Look here, my friend, I don't wish to appear inquisitive, but I hope you will pardon my asking you one question?"

"Certainly; what is it?"

"Are you a detective? Answer or not, as you choose."

"I am not afraid to trust you, and it might be possible that you could render me a good turn some time, so I have no hesitancy in saying that I am a detective—or at least I have come up here for the purpose of spying those villains out."

"I thought so, and I wish you success in the undertaking. But I fear you have undertaken an impossible task. Those devils

are too suspicious to give a man a chance to learn anything about them. They seem to make it a point to kill every stranger on sight. I don't know but that if I was you I'd give up the idea. It's too dangerous."

"No, I shall remain a while, anyhow. I thank you for your interest in the matter, however."

"Well, if you think it best to stay, do so, and if at any time I can aid you, let me know."

"Thanks, doctor; I shall bear that in mind."

Shaking hands, the two men separated, the doctor continuing his homeward journey, while Jack struck into a trail following up the river bank.

The latter was not long in reaching the cabin where Perry Jackson lived. The cabin and everything about bespoke the character of its occupants, and Jack would have readily guessed the sort of man Jackson was, even if he had never seen him.

Stopping at the racked, broken bars that stood in front of the cabin, Jack "helloed" two or three times, and at last was rewarded by the sight of a head thrust around the corner of the house, and at the same time a voice cried:

"Wal, whut yer want?"

"Is this Mr. Jackson's place?"

"I 'low it air. Whut yer want?"

"I want to see Mr. Jackson. Is he at home at present?"

"Reckon he ain't fer off. Whut yer want ov 'im?"

"I met him to-day and arranged to stop with him for a few days, and——"

"Yer ther chap, air ye? Wal, I thought you warn't comin' till to-morry."

"But I changed my mind and concluded to come to-day."

"It don't make no difference, I jedge. Won't yer light?" and the speaker came out in full view, revealing to Jack's gaze a tall, stout, neglected-looking female who had probably seen the sun of fifty summers.

Jack was about to comply with the woman's invitation to "light," but at that moment his attention was attracted by a figure emerging from the thick bushes across the road.

For a minute the two men looked intently at each other, while the woman, placing her hands on her hips, and with her arms akimbo, stood looking silently on.

"Good-evening, Mr. Jackson," Jack said.

"Wal, I'm goldarned," Jackson exclaimed, as a broad grin broke over his face.

"What's the matter with you?"

"Nothin'."

"Well, what are you 'goldarned' about?"

"Say, I thought you war'n't agwine ter come till ter-morry?"

"That was my intention, but I concluded to come down to-night."

"Oh, huh."

"There's nothing very strange about that, is there?"

"Naw, not perticlerly! A feller's mouty liable ter change 'is notion purty often up thar in them mountains. Been hevin' er leetle racket up thar this evenin', hain't ye?"

"How did you know?"

"Oh, I hearn them shootin'. Doggone my cats, stranger, but I thought they'd shorely got ye that time. I'm dinged glad they didn't, though."

"Thanks. Say, what were you doing up in the mountains?"

"Jest huntin' er mite. Arter I kem hum from down thar whar I met ye, I went up ther mounting er piece, but when they 'gun ter shoot, I come back."

Jack began to wonder if he was mistaken in Perry Jackson, and if in fleeing from the mountains and from Tucker's he had bet-

tered his situation, or had merely, to use a somewhat worn phrase, "jumped from the fryingpan into the fire?" Was it possible that the whole settlement of the Ozarks were leagued together, and that Jackson was a member of the moonshiners' gang? Suspicion was very strong against him, and while his looks and his language proclaimed his innocence and inoffensiveness, Jack could not account for the old man's visit to the mountains except on the theory that he went there for a sinister purpose. Was Jackson a friend, as he professed, or an enemy, as he appeared?

CHAPTER XIII.

A PROPOSAL.

Whether Jackson was an enemy or a friend, or whatever he might be, Jack Marvin resolved on taking the chances of spending a night under his roof. It was already fast approaching night, and there was no other place that he knew he would be safer than where he was.

So, dismounting, he followed his host into the cabin, and in due time sat down to a repast of corn bread, bacon and cold "greens." The bill of fare was not extensive, nor were the viands temptingly delicate, but to a man who had eaten but little for twenty-four hours, and who had passed through the exercise and hardships that Jack Marvin had, any fare, however rough and course, had a delectable appearance; and to the corn bread, bacon and "greens" he did full justice, to say the least.

A week passed, and though Jack had ventured up into the mountains every day, he had returned at night none the wiser for his pains. Since the day he left Tucker's he had met with no one save Perry Jackson's family, and, as may be readily surmised, his life began to wear a terribly monotonous aspect.

He would have almost welcomed some of the stirring scenes of his first day in the mountains, as preferable to the dull, quiet times he was dragging through. It is true at first Perry Jackson's talk amused him, but after a few days he tired of listening to it for hours at a time; and as for Mrs. Tildy Jackson, his wife, or Miss Sallie Jackson, his daughter, they were no more valuable as society than two stumps. The former was never able to express an idea in all she said, while the latter never said anything to express an idea, if she possessed any, which seemed extremely doubtful.

Jack had not forgotten Bet, and often of nights when he lay up in the garret loft on his hard bed, trying to woo sleep and rest, she was in his thoughts, and he was conscious of a tender solicitude for her welfare and happiness. Time and again he pictured out her life up there on the mountains, and often he wondered what she was doing, and if she was thinking of him.

Once in his rambles among the mountains he had penetrated some distance beyond Munger's mill. In fact, every day he had gone in that direction, for he was firmly imbued with the idea that the still was located somewhere in that region. He had never gone up toward Tucker's, but now he resolved to do so on the morrow, and with the determination fully settled, he dropped off to sleep.

He awoke quite early the next morning, and arising, went out for a promenade up and down the path that lay in front of the house. He had made two or three turns to and fro, when Jackson came out, and leaning over the fence, said:

"Yer up airly this morning."

"Yes, a little before my regular time,"

"Goin' up to ther mountains ergin ter-day?"

"I think I shall."

"Uh, huh. Hain't smelt no mice up thar yit, I reckon?"

"No, I have found nothing so far."

"Think yer will?"

"I can't say. I can only keep on trying."

"That's so. Say, I'd like ter help ye some ef thar wuz any way I could."

"I'm thankful for your good will, Mr. Jackson, but I don't think of any way in which you could aid me, unless——"

"Unless whut?"

"Unless you were disposed to give me a pointer on the location of the still."

"Why, gosh amity, man, I dunno whar ther still is no mor'n you do."

"I thought, perhaps, living here as long as you have, that you might have a pretty good idea about where it is located."

"Wal, I'll tell ye I don't know er derved thing erbout it, but ef I wuz goin' ter hunt fer it, doggone my old pelt, mister, ef I'd ever git very fer erway frum ther mill. Mind, I hain't a sayin' it's thar nowhar, but it must be."

"Thanks. I shall remember your suggestion, and try to profit by it."

"Say, yer ack es if yer wuz er leetle skeery o' me. I wush yer wouldn't do that, fer I swar I wouldn't think er goin' ergin yer fer them goldarned skunks up thar, an' yer'll diskiver it ef yer stay here long ernuff."

"Oh, no; I'm not harboring any suspicion of you, at all."

"Hain't, eh? I wuz erfeered yer wuz. Say, I want ter speak ter ye erbout er leetle matter o' business, ef yer feel like listenin'."

"All right, go ahead."

"Wal, yer know Sal?"

"Yes, I've seen her more or less for a week, and I think I may say I know her to a certain extent."

"Uh, huh. Wal, that's whut I wuz comin' ter. Sal, she's er quare sort er critter an' won't talk none, so she wanted that I should talk ter you fer 'er, an' tell ye that she's tuck er powerful notion to ye, an' ef yer wuz willin' she'd like fust-rate ter marry ye. Whut yer got ter say ter thet?"

Jack stood for some time thoroughly dumb with astonishment. It began to be quite apparent to him that if the Ozark Mountain country was nothing else, it was beyond doubt a land of sudden surprises and unlooked-for events. A man could be killed there without a moment of warning, and equally as unexpectedly could he become entangled in love's meshes.

At first Perry Jackson's statement appeared too utterly ridiculous for a moment's serious consideration, but when he recalled the fact that he could not afford to lose Perry's good will, and that to treat the matter lightly would probably result not only in that, but also in gaining his everlasting and bitter enmity as well, he took a more serious view of the matter, and when he answered, said:

"I am hardly in a position just now, Mr. Jackson, to give you a favorable answer. I have not thought of marrying at all, and even now I could hardly think of such a thing with my chances of escaping alive from the successful completion of the work I have begun so slender. However, I am truly gratified by the honor yourself and daughter have done me, and I promise you I will consider the matter, and if the time ever comes when I can conscientiously make your daughter my wife, I will marry her."

"Azackly. An' let me say this much, mister, ef yer marry Sal, yer'll fin' yer got er mouty good, solid gal. She hain't rale purty, but she's er worker, an' when it comes ter tendin' er crap she jest can't be laid over, an' that's er strong pint in 'er favor, I take it."

"It undoubtably is."

"Then I kin tell 'er yer'll figger on it?"

"Yes, you may tell her that."

"Wal, that hain't as much as she cackilated on, fer she wuz lyin' off that you an' her 'ud go right down to ther squar's an' git married this mornin'. But it'll be summat consolatin' ter know yer goin' ter figger on it. Reckon yer mout say fer shore this evenin' er to-morry."

"Perhaps I might; but I rather expect I shall require a little more time than that even."

Just at that moment breakfast was announced and the conversation ended, greatly to Jack's relief.

This new and totally unlooked-for incident upset the young man's nerves, and it was with a weak and faltering appetite he sat down to the meal of inevitable corn bread, bacon and "greens," and it was very little of it he ate.

After the meal was over he hurried away on foot, taking a "high cut" that he had discovered leading across the mountains in the direction of Tucker's house.

As he laboriously ascended the rugged, precipitous path, his mind dwelt on the proposition Jackson had made to him, and he tried to devise some way of evading a positive answer.

He knew it would be expected of him that night, or the next night at least, and he knew not what he should say.

CHAPTER XIV.

LIGE JONES.

When Jack had gone quite a way up the mountain path, and had become pretty thoroughly worn and weary, he sat down on a large stone to make a mental inventory of the events of his life during the last ten days.

Having thoroughly rested, and having also once more gone over the prospect before him, and having again decided to see the matter to the end, he arose and walked on.

After going some distance by a path that led up and up by a devious and winding course, sometimes across a little stream of clear, cold water that flowed down from a spring somewhere along the mountain crest, and again edging between the large boulders that towered up twenty feet or more, he came to a tolerable plain road that led along the base of the second rise in the mountain.

This he surmised was the narrow strip upon which Tucker's house stood, and he doubted not that by following the road around he would easily reach the end of his journey.

With this idea he started forward at a brisk walk; and though he was awake to his position, and kept a sharp lookout around, nothing transpired to disturb his peace and quiet until he had gone a mile or more.

He was just coming out in a little strip of clearing, when riding across from the timber on the other side he saw a native of perhaps fifty years, who had much the appearance of all the other natives, in that he was tall, raw boned, hard featured, grizzly and unkempt, and was obviously a stranger to both comb and soap.

He was just what nature had made him, save for the wear and tear of time, and the accumulation of the dirt, filth and hair that comes with years.

Jack, seeing the approaching figure, would have dodged back in the bushes, but when he made a movement to do so, he found he was too late, for the native had seen him and motioned him to stop. Knowing that it was useless to attempt to escape, Jack drew his pistol and calmly waited the man's approach. He came up, "whoa" his horse, which readily obeyed, and for a little while sat silently gazing at the young man before him.

"Well, I'm here," Jack said, growing impatient at the old fellow's continued stare. "Don't you see me?"

"Ya-a-a."

"Do you think you'll know me when you see me again?"
 "Dun-no."
 "What do you want, anyhow?"
 "Noth-in'."
 "Where are you going?"
 "Ho-me."
 "Well, why don't you go, then?"
 "Hain't in no hoory, I reckon," the old man drawled out in his slow way. "Got all day afore me. Whar mout you be gwine?"
 "Up to Tucker's."
 "D'you know Tuck-er?"
 "I've seen him."
 "Uh! h-u-h."
 "Do you know Tucker?"
 "I've seed 'm."
 "You have, eh?"
 "Ya-a-s."
 "Are you a friend of his?"
 "No-o; not much. Air you?"
 "No; not much."
 "Uh! h-u-h."
 "Say, what's your name?"
 "My n-a-m-e?"
 "Yes; what's your name?"
 "Wal, it's Lige Jones; but they call me Lazy Jones fer short up he-re."
 "Pretty suggestive name, too, isn't it?"
 "Uh, h-u-h."
 "Where do you live?"
 "Er mile an'-a-half down thar."
 "What did you motion me to stop for?"
 "I didn't kn-o-w but you mout use terbacker."
 "I do, but what of it?"
 "Couldn't yer give er feller er chaw?"
 "Certainly. Here, help yourself."
 As Jack handed out a good sized chunk of flat tobacco, the old man's eyes twinkled and his mouth spread into a broad, pleased grin. Taking a huge slice from the piece he placed it in his mouth, and as he chewed it a complacent, satisfied look settled over his features.
 "Do you like it, old man?" Jack asked, after he had watched the old fellow a minute.
 "Uh, h-u-h."
 "Pretty fair tobacco?"
 "Ya-a-s. Say, you must be er rich 'un."
 "Why, what makes you think that?"
 "Don't none but rich 'uns chaw that sort o' terbacker."
 "Don't? Why, where I came from they all use that kind."
 "Uh, h-u-h. All rich 'uns thar, I reckon. Hain't no rich 'uns here."
 "No rich ones at all up here?"
 "No-o, not less'n it's Hank Duncan, an' he ain't rich 'nuff ter chaw that."
 "Is Hank pretty well fixed?"
 "Uh, h-u-h."
 "Hank's a pretty good fellow, isn't he?"
 "Dunno nothin' 'bout that, mister."
 "I thought you knew him well?"
 "Uh, h-u-h."
 "You know where he lives, I presume?"
 "Ya-a-s."
 "Well, I want to see Hank right away. Do you think I would be liable to find him at home if I were to go there now?"
 "'Spect not."

"He's pretty apt to be at his still, isn't he?"
 "Dunno. Mout be."
 "Well, I could go there, but I have never been to the still from this direction, and I don't know whether I could find it or not. Let's see now, it's how far down the road before I would turn off?"
 Whatever secret hopes Jack had of leading the old man on to the divulgence of any information in an unguarded moment were short lived, for the old fellow evidently saw the point, and with a knowing wink in his eye and a knowing nod of his head, he deliberately drawled out:
 "You're a slick 'un, young feller, but I hain't ersleep every time my eyes is shet. Say, what direction did yer come from when yer went ter ther still?"
 "Oh, from the other side, I judge."
 "Uh, h-u-h."
 Jack discovered that he was badly mistaken in the estimate he had placed on Lige Jones, and that however lazy or however slow the old chap was, he lacked a great deal of being the fool he seemed; and if any information was to be secured from him it must be gotten by some other way than by an attempt to trap the old man.
 It was plainly evident that he was too wary to be caught in that manner. Jack hardly knew how to approach him again, but taking the chances on it he said:
 "Look here, Mr. Jones, I take it that you are a real clever sort of man."
 "Uh, h-u-h," Jones replied.
 "Well, now, when a man does you a favor you are willing to return it?"
 "Uh, h-u-h."
 "Now, you asked me for a chew of tobacco a little while ago, didn't you?"
 "Uh, h-u-h."
 "And I gave it to you?"
 "Uh, h-u-h."
 "That was a favor, wasn't it?"
 "Ya-a-s."
 "It's true, it wasn't much of a favor, and what I ask in return isn't much of a favor either. Now you'll do me a favor—a small favor, won't you?"
 "Mebby so. It depends on what it is."
 "Well, I want to see Hank Duncan right away, and I must go to the still to see him, for I can't wait until he comes home. Now, all in the world I ask of you is, that you tell me the direction. That's a small favor to ask, but it's a right important matter to me, for my business with Hank is urgent."
 "Uh, h-u-h. Won't yer business keep?"
 "No, it won't keep long."
 "Wal, it'll hev ter spile, then."
 "Why? Won't you tell me the way?"
 "No-o, I won't."
 "Why won't you?"
 "Bekase, stranger, I don't know it."
 "Looks like you could have found it out long before this."
 "Uh, h-u-h; I mout, mister, ef I'd tried, but I hain't tried. I hain't never felt anxious to have lead put inter me."
 It was pretty evident that the old man had a well-founded idea that the less he knew and said about Hank Duncan and his affairs, the better for his own good, and Jack began to despair of getting any information from him, if, indeed, he knew anything. Everybody appeared to be afraid of Duncan, and he was evidently a man to be feared, judging from what others said, as well as from Jack's own limited acquaintance with him.

"Say, look here, old man," Jack said, trying another tactic, "I am not a friend to Hank Duncan, but, on the contrary, I am trying to catch the gang of moonshiners who have so long cursed this section. Do you understand?"

"Uh, h-u-h."

"Now, if you can help me any, I want you to do it, and you sha'n't lose by it."

"Uh, h-u-h."

"Will you help me?"

"I'd like ter 'commode yer, stranger, but I hain't ready ter die jest yit. Good-day."

CHAPTER XV.

AN AWKWARD INTERRUPTION.

"Well, I'll be hanged!" Jack ejaculated, as he gazed at the vanishing form of the very slow, but very cautious Lige Jones. "Old chap, you may be as lazy as they ever make them, but I've seen a good many people who had a great deal less sense. What's a fellow to do? Nobody knows anything about Hank Duncan and his gang, or about the still; and if they do know they won't talk, so it all amounts to the same thing to a man who is seeking information. If I could just get a pointer now, something to sort of start me on the right trail, I think I might follow it up, and at last run the game down. But here I am without any knowledge at all, except that the still is not far from Munger's mill, and all I can do is to just blunder about through the woods and hills, taking the chances of stumbling against the still, or a bullet, with twenty chances to one in favor of the latter."

And Jack trudged on in none the better humor for his encounter with Lige Jones. As he expected, the road led to Tucker's house, and a few minutes sufficed for him to make the rest of his journey.

Bet was sitting in the door and saw him approach, and as she made no motion to detain him, he rightly guessed that there was nothing to be feared, and accordingly he walked boldly to the door.

"What did you come back for?" Bet asked, in a trembling voice.

"I have never gone very far away," he replied, seating himself on the step by her. "Are you not glad I came?"

"Yes, I'm glad; and yet you ought to have gone away and stayed."

"I don't think so, and so we differ in our opinions. But let that go. Are you well and strong again?"

"Yes; only sometimes my head hurts a little, and I grow sick of this life."

"I don't blame you for that. Say, what shall I call you? Bet isn't nice, and Miss Tucker is too cold and distant. How will it do to say Lizzie?"

"Call me that, will you?"

"Yes; do you like it?"

"It's much nicer than the other."

"All right, then; that's the name I'll always call you by. Where's your father?"

"He's gone hunting again."

"Always hunting. Seems to me that you'd get terribly lonesome here by yourself so much."

"I do; but I never noticed it so much till this week."

"Why do you notice it so much this week?"

As Jack asked this he looked up into the girl's face, and he saw her eyes drop and a blush crimson her cheeks and neck as she mumbled out:

"I don't know."

If before he had any doubts about the matter, he certainly had

none now, for all at once it was revealed to him that he loved the girl as he had never loved any being in all his life; and he knew that she loved him in return.

Throwing his arms about her, he drew her to him in a firm embrace and kissed her several times.

At that moment they were both startled by a loud "haw-haw," and looking quickly up they beheld near them the uncouth figure of a tall young mountaineer. They were both too surprised and shocked to find a ready use of their tongues, and as for the newcomer, he simply let his feelings out in a broad, idiotic grin that spoke both of amusement and displeasure. Thus they remained silently looking at each other for several seconds, at the end of which time the mountaineer broke the silence by ejaculating:

"Wal, I'll be gorsh darned."

"What's the matter with you?" Jack asked.

"Say, that wuz gittin' thar fust-class, warn't it?"

Jack made no reply to this observation, and the fellow went on: "Young feller, you seem ter be mouty solid 'uth ther gal."

Still no reply.

"Say, I've knowed 'er a heap longer'n you hev, an' she wouldn't nigh let me tech 'er. Doggone my skin, but you wuz gittin' thar in a hoory."

"Look here, young man," Jack exclaimed, rising, "be a little careful of your jaw, will you? You've said enough, and now it's time to hold your peace. Do you understand?"

"I reckon I heerd yer, mister; but say, whut yer gittin' riled fer? 'Taint no sin ter kiss er gal, is it?"

"No, it's not, but hush up or I'll make you hush."

"Sartinly, sartinly. Jest es you say, you know. Reckon yer don't know me, do ye?"

"Know you? Of course not. How should I when I never saw you before?"

"In co'se you couldn't. But my name's Jenkins—Jerry Jenkins. Ever hearn o' him?"

"No, I think not."

"You'll excuse me, stranger, but I must say that yer hain't doin' jest fair 'uth me. Yer see, I have been er lyin' off all erlong ter marry Bet, an' I 'low yer hain't no right ter put in thar. What yer think o' it?"

"I think you are either a fool or impudent puppy, or perhaps both, and I shall have no more to say to you. Miss Tucker, will you go in?"

The girl arose to obey, and as she disappeared through the door, Jerry broke out into another of his big horse-laugh, and wound up by exclaiming:

"Miss Tucker! Wal, I'll be dadswiggled ef yer hain't purty doggoned sweet on Bet, shore."

"Look here, Mr. Jenkins, you have gone far enough, and if you say another word I'll knock you down."

Jerry stood stock-still for a moment, scraping his jaw with his nails while he eyed Jack from head to foot. Then deliberately throwing off his hat, he jumped up, popped his heels together, and cried:

"Whoop, knock me down, will ye? Come into me, yer little spindle-shanked mite o' creation. Come into me an' I'll eat yer at er bite. Whoopee, I'll splinter ye ter pieces."

"Whoopee, come inter me, ye spindle-shinned gander!" Jerry repeated, hopping about in a high state of excitement.

Jack said nothing, but calmly advanced a step or two nearer and coolly knocked the great, gawky fellow flat on his back with one well-directed blow from his fist.

Jerry made no effort to rise, and whether he was unconscious from the blow, or whether he was paralyzed with astonishment, he lay sprawled out on the ground in an apparently lifeless heap.

BRAVE AND BOLD.

"Get up!" Jack commanded.

"Sartinly," the other replied, proceeding at once to obey the command.

Getting on his feet, Jerry stood looking intently at his assailant for several seconds, after which he exclaimed:

"Wal, I'll be gorsh darned!"

"Are you satisfied?" Jack asked.

"I reckon I air, mister. I hain't no hog; an' I don't want ther yarth. But say, how'd yer do that?"

"Want me to show you?"

"Guess I hain't hankerin' ter know, an' I reckon I won't trouble ye no more."

"Now, let me tell you, my friend, hereafter be a little careful how you speak of Miss Tucker or to her. She's a lady, and you have got to act the part of a gentleman toward her. Do you understand what I mean?"

"I 'low I do."

"And will you remember it?"

"Shore, in co'se. Bet's er fine ga—er lady, stranger, an' I think er heap ov 'er. I been er cackilatin' all erlong ter marry 'er, an' ole Tucker he's been figgurin' on it, too. But doggone my hide, ef it don't 'pear right smart like you'd sorter upshot things."

"Miss Tucker has a perfect right to do as she chooses, and if she is willing to marry you, I suppose she will."

"Reckon yer right thar. But she don't 'pear ter be willin'."

"Then, of course, that ends the matter, and if you were disposed to act the gentleman you would let her alone."

"Reckon I'll hafter."

A short silence ensued, during which time Jerry picked up his hat, slapped it a few times against the side of the house to dust it, placed it on his head, and took a firm stand with both hands on his hips.

"Looky here, mister," he said, "I'm just doggoned ef I don't sorter like ye. I tell ye, ther feller whut knocks Jerry Jenkins off his pins es slick es you done it, hain't no slouch. By gorsh, it takes er good un ter do it es nice es that wuz done. Say, I jedge yer don't know Jim Duncan?"

"No, I do not."

"Wal, Jim an' me's been at it off an' on ever since we wuz boys. Either on us kin lick anything in ther mounting, but we hain't never made out yit which un ov us is ther best man. We've fit at every doggoned log-rollin' an' house-raisin', an' every other sort o' gutherin', an' sometimes one licks, an' sometimes t'other. Now, I tell yer whut, I'd love ter see yer flummix Jim onct like yer did me."

"Would you?"

"Bet I would."

"But I have no reason for fighting Jim."

"Shucks, that needn't stand in the way none. I hain't never had nothin' ergin 'im nother, but we've allus fit. Thar'll be er rollin' over ther ole Buster's day arter ter-morry, an' Jim'll be thar. Wush you'd come. Kain't yer?"

"I'm afraid not."

"Dorggone it all, mister, but yer ort. It'll be er bushel er fun ter see yer keel Jim over 'fore he knows it, an' ther fellers will all swear by you arter that. Say, try an' git over, won't ye?"

"Yes, I'll see about it."

"Thankee. Now lookyer, we're purty good frien's, hain't we?"

"Yes, so far as I am concerned."

"Will ye shake han's on that?"

"Certainly."

"Thankee ag'in. An' now see here, stranger, ef yer ever want er frien' er er favor jest think o' Jerry Jenkins, will yer, an' ef yer whistle I'll come."

"All right, Jerry, I'll bear that in mind. Now, before you go, tell me something about Jim Duncan. Who is he, and where does he live?"

The two men had walked out to the yard fence as they talked, and now stood leaning against it.

"Wal, fust an' for'most, Jim is ole Hank Duncan's boy, an' he lives 'uth his pap over beryant ther mill. Yer know whar ther mill is, I jedge?"

"Oh, yes, I know where the mill is. That is the mill down close to Hank Duncan's still, I suppose?"

"Ya-a-s. That is, I mean Munger's mill. I dunno nothin' 'bout no still," and Jerry shifted about uneasily.

"Of course you know something about the still," Jack replied, "and there is no use for you to deny it."

"I swar I don't, stranger. Ackly an' honestly I don't."

"I don't believe you. I know that Hank Duncan has a still down there, and so do you. Now don't you?"

"Wal, ter be hones', mister, I hev hearn sick talk."

"And you know where it is?"

"No, I don't, shore. That's er fact, stranger."

"I believe you're lying to me."

"Hones' truth, mister, I don't know er derved thing 'bout it. But air yer one o' them fellers that's been er comin' down yere ter hunt them moonshiners?"

"I have a little business with Hank Duncan, and I'd like to know where his distillery is."

"Yas, I thought yer wuz one ov 'em. Say, yer seem ter be a mouty nice sort o' feller, an' I like yer fust-rate, an' I wanter give yer a word ov advice. Ef I wuz you I wouldn't go sneakin' erroun' arter that dorggoned ole still. I'll jest be blamed ef I would. 'Tain't no more use ner nothin', an' asides yer shore ter git kilt. I've lived right yere ever sence I wuz borned, an' I hain't got no more ijee o' whar that blamed ole still is ner you hev."

"Have you ever tried to find it?"

"No-o, I kain't rightly say es I hev. But I've been nigh a'most all over these yere mount'ins, an' while I warn't huntin' no still, I 'low I seed 'bout ever'thing that lie in sight, an' I jedge I'd er knowed er still ef I'd er seed it."

"Then you have no idea where it is?"

"Not er dinged bit."

"Seems to be pretty well hidden, then?"

"That's right. Tell ye whut, I'd as lief try ter find er chigger in er forty acre fiel' er rye, es ter try ter find that thar blamed ole still."

Having satisfied himself that no information of any value was to be obtained from Jerry, Jack bid him good-day and returned to the house.

CHAPTER XVI.

LOST IN THE STORM.

Jack tarried at Tucker's longer than he had intended, and, when at last he resolved to go, he found that it was near night.

He had gone a mile, perhaps, when his attention was attracted by a long, low rumbling thunder, followed quickly by a swift gust of wind and a sudden darkness.

Glancing up he saw the clouds rolling, boiling, and pitching forward in angry-looking masses.

For a moment there was a lull, a dead calm, and not a leaf in the forest seemed to stir—even the birds had hushed their notes, and a perfect silence reigned on every side.

Soon the thunder reports grew louder and more frequent. The flashes of lightning shot to and fro across the heavens like so

many serpent tongues in angry combat. Then a few large drops of water fell, pattering on the leaves like the ticking of machinery.

Then up from the west, from the valley and caves, came the hoarse roar of a terrible storm, and a moment later it swept up the gorges, over the mountain crests, across the plateaus and plains, sweeping the dry leaves along and bending the trees until their tops almost touched the ground.

From every quarter came the crash of falling trees, some uprooted from the earth, some snapped off at the base, and some riven from top to bottom.

Jack waited in breathless awe and wonder. Before him, behind him, and on every side, trees were going down before the power and strength of the awful storm.

Should he go forward, there was danger; should he retreat, there was equal danger.

Where he was there was less danger, for he was in the midst of a narrow cleared strip, and he resolved to stand his ground and wait.

Directly the storm ceased and was succeeded by a calm as oppressive as that which had preceded it. For a moment the heavens lighted up and Jack started on, but he had advanced not more than two hundred yards when the clouds seemed to have opened and poured their contents out. Such a rain mortal man seldom sees. It came in sheets and slices, and within five minutes after it began to fall the mountainside was one solid sheet of rushing water. See? It was impossible to discern objects twenty feet away—objects as large as trees.

The road was full of broken trees and boughs, and as Jack stumbled on amid the rain and gloom, he had little idea of where his steps were tending. Now clambering over a fallen forest monarch, now scrambling through a matted growth of shrubs and vines, and now picking his way along some narrow pass, he trudged forward as best he could. His progress was slow and the darkness thickened rapidly, and before he left the level track to descend the mountain, he became uncertain of his course, and once or twice halted as in the glare of a lightning flash he sought for some reminder of the course he had pursued that morning.

He stumbled, blundered and splashed along until he came to a little rivulet that ran brimful of muddy water down the mountainside. Was this the gorge he had followed up a few hours ago? There was nothing to identify it to his mind, yet he thought it must be the same, for he had no remembrance of crossing any other along his way either in going or coming. He felt about for the road for some time, until a flash of lightning revealed to him that no road was there; he was lost!

Jack walked on, perhaps a mile, perhaps two miles, for at such a time and in such roads it was hard to compute distances.

He had just made a turn around a huge rock that projected out of the mountainside, when all at once he felt the earth sinking beneath his feet, and in that instant a flash of lightning revealed to him his true situation, which caused his hair to rise up and his heart to stand still.

He was on the brink of a precipice that dropped down perpendicularly sixty or seventy feet, and one second more would have sufficed to have sent him down to the bottom of the Meramec River, which washed the base of the cliff with its wild, angry waves.

Jack had reached a point where the plateau ran out, and where the mountain and river met. There was nowhere a passage, that he could discover, yet the road, though dim and apparently little used, plainly led up to that point.

There was a mystery about this that he could not understand. Why did the people come that far, if they could go no farther?

What object would they have in coming there, and returning by the same course?

Of two things he was certain. First, people did come there, and second, they did not come there for the simple purpose of being able to walk back.

It was equally plain to him that they could not by any possible means pass beyond that point. Then what brought them there?

As he asked himself this question, and stood searching about in every flash of light for some answer to it, he heard a grating noise behind him, like the turning of a door on a pair of ill-fitting wooden hinges, and glancing around he saw a spark of light, apparently buried away back in the bowels of the mountain.

In a moment he understood it all, and his heart beat fast and hard.

In the excitement of that moment he forgot everything—forgot his surroundings, forgot the rain that pelted him so unmercifully. There was a fascination about that little spark of light that chained his eye as if it had been a most powerful magnet.

A minute passed, and he still gazed intently at it. He knew now what it all meant, and he blessed the storm that sent him wandering along the mountain way, for it had been the means of him finding what he had long sought, and what others had sought unsuccessfully.

Suddenly that grating, rasping noise was repeated, and the spark of light disappeared.

"I have it! I have it!" Jack cried, exultantly, under his breath. "I cannot be mistaken. Let it rain, let it blow, let the thunder and the lightning do their worst; I am rewarded, for I have found it!"

And indeed Jack had just cause for exultation, for he had found the still, and at that moment stood at the door of the moonshiners' den.

CHAPTER XVII.

JACK PLAYS GHOST.

While Jack yet stood felicitating himself on his good fortune, the door opened again, and he heard a low murmuring of voices within. Realizing that he was in imminent danger of being discovered, he stepped back in the shadow of the large stone, and straining his ears, listened intently to the voices of the men. Their conversation was carried on in low, suppressed tones and only fragments of it reached him in an intelligible shape. But yet, broken and disjointed as those fragments were, if he had needed any evidence to confirm his suspicions of those men, he would have found it in them.

Suddenly the rain ceased, and the two men came out and stood on the narrow ledge of stone leading back to the cave entrance.

"Phew, whut er night it air," one of them remarked.

"Must er rained er power up in the west," the other observed. "I hain't hearn the river roar like that fer er good many years, hev you?"

"Not sence thet night we ketched that feller spyin' 'round here. Reckon he thort ther river roared er good bit."

"I s'pect so."

"I reckon, though, he hain't never been bothered 'uth sich things no more."

"I guess not. He wuz the feller ye throwed over the bank, warn't he?"

"Yes. I wuz thinkin' 'at yer wuz with us. But ye warn't."

"No, I warn't here that night. How do ye do it? Purty slick, I jedge, but I hain't never hearn ther pertic'lars."

"Wal, we hain't never said much erbout it, fer somehow I

hain't never felt jest easy over it. Every night when it's dark an' rainy like, it 'pears someway as ef I can hear an' see it all es plain es I heard and seed it then. Yer've hearn o' haunts, hain't ye?"

"Yas, ghosts an' fixin's."

"Wal, I dunno ef I don't b'leeve in them things now. I ust ter laugh at sech notions, but sence that night I've felt kinder different. Thar, didn't ye hear that?"

"No, I didn't hear nothin', only them waves a-slappin' up ergin ther rocks down thar. Did you?"

"I thort I heerd a voice sayin' 'My God!' jest like that feller said it es we hove 'im over, an' then I heerd er splash in ther water down thar, jest like somethin' had fell inter it. That's jest ther way it sounded that night when he struck. I dunno why it is, but almost every night I kin hear them noises, an' 'specially ef it's dark an' rainy. I reckon them must be ghosts."

"How'd ye come ter ketch 'im?"

"Wal, yer see, he found his way down yere somehow, but how he ever done it, I dunno; an' while he wuz standin' out thar a-lookin' erround an' wonderin', I guess, why, Hank an' Jabe come up from t'other side, an' afore ther feller knowed it they had 'im fast an' solid. Wal, then ther question come up es ter whut he wuz doin' here, an' they axed 'im ter explain.

"I got lost," sez he, "an' didn't know whar I wuz goin' till I wuz stopped here."

"Whut's yer business?" Hank axed.

"Nothin'," sez he.

"Wal, whut yer doin' in ther mountings, then?"

"Jest er travelin' through."

"Wal, yer see, we couldn't tell whur he wuz lyin' er not, an' so arter we'd talked ther matter over er bit, it wuz ergreed that it 'ud be safer ter fling 'im in ther river, with er rock tied to 'im, though fer my part I kin'er helt out ergin it. But Hank, he stood fer doin' it, an' Hank o' co'se allus hes his way, so we all guv in at last.

"Wal, when we tole ther feller whut we'd ergreed ter do 'uth him, an' axed 'if ef he hed er word ter say fust, he jest broke down an' cried like er baby, an' he warn't nothin' but er little punny striplin' ov er chap nuther. When he'd sorter got over his bust o' cryin', Hank axed 'im ergin ef he hed anything to say, an' when he'd sort o' steadied up er leetle he answered:

"I don't mind ther dyin'," sez he, "ef it warn't fer her sake."

"Fer whose sake?" Hank axed.

"Then ther little chap sorter braced up, an' tole er long story 'bout how he lived 'way up North sum'ers, an' how he'd fell in love 'uth er gal 'bout er year ergo, an' how her folks hed moved down below ther Ozarks, an' how he wuz er goin' ter her home ter git married. Wal, sir, he tole it all over so solemn an' sad like that we wuz teched by it, an' I dunno ef some on us didn't feel kinder moist 'bout ther eyes.

"But Hank, he wuz es hard es ever, an' he swore it wuz all er darned lie, an' thet ther feller must be put outen ther way.

"Wal, ter make it short, Hank wuz boss, an' his word went, an' so ther feller wuz tied to er rock an' both o' them wuz rolled inter ther river.

"Jest es we shoved 'em off, ther moon shined out fer a minute, an' lookin' down, I seed ther feller's white face turned up toward us, an' I heerd him say: 'My God!' An' then he struck ther water an' went under, an' ther moon went behind er cloud, an' ag'in ever'thing wuz dark es Egypt an' still es death.

"Thar, now, that's ther whole story from fust ter last, savin' that them ha'nts sometimes comes around, an' I keep er seein' that white face an' hearin' them words jest es plain es I seed an' heard them that night. An' one time I wuz standin' out yere

when it wuz rale dark, an' I kep' a-lookin' down thar, an' a-hearin' them words an' seeing that face, an' ther fust thing I knowed ther moon popped out frum berhind er cloud, an' I seed er sight whut jest nachully tuck my breath erway, an' made my hair stan' up on eend."

"Whut wuz it?"

"In ther moonlight I seed the feller er goin' down, down ter ther water, an' out in ther middle o' ther river I seed er woman all dressed in white a-comin' a-runnin' on ther water, it 'peared like, an' she come right toward the feller, a-holdin' out 'er hands like she wuz tryin' ter ketch 'im, an' 'er face wuz white es er sheet, an' ther purtiest face yer ever looked at, with her eyes a-shinin' an' her hair a-floatin' out behin' 'er. On an' on she come, tell she wuz 'uthin er few feet ov 'im, an' then he sunk down in ther water, an' she stopped an' put 'er hands to her breast, an' then the moon went behind er cloud, an' that wuz all I seed ov it."

"A ha'nt, yer reckon?"

"It wuz er ha'nt er a ghost er somethin' o' that sort, an' I tell ye sence that night I've felt mouty quare 'bout whut tuck place. That thar feller tole ther truth, an' wuz er goin' ter git married, I'll bet er hoss, an' somehow his gal knowed whut wuz a-happenin' to 'im, an' her sperit jest nachully come ter try ter save 'im."

"Mebby it warn't her sperit."

"Sho! I know it wuz, an' ef you'd a-seed her eyes an' face es I seed 'em, you'd a-swore it warn't nobody but ther gal he wuz a-goin' ter marry, fer I never seed sich looks o' love in no woman's eyes an' face in all my life. An' my, but she wuz purty.

"I've seed lots o' techin' sights sence I come here, an' I've hepped ter put er good many fellers erway in one way an' ernother, but I never hed nothin' ter stick to me an' ha'nt me like that, an' I don't bleeve I ever will ergin."

"Thar, didn't yer hear them words?"

"I didn't hear nothin' but ther river er roarin' an' splashin'."

"Wal, I did. I heard them words jes' es plain's I hear you. Yer rickerleck I opened ther door an' shet it a while ergo, don't ye?"

"Afore we come out? Yas."

"Wal, I thought I seed that feller standin' right over thar. It didn't look jest like 'im, but I seed er man, an' I know it wuz him."

CHAPTER XVIII.

A NARROW ESCAPE.

As these last words fell upon Jack's ears, he shrank back farther into the shadow of the rock behind which he had sought refuge.

"Mebby yer did see somebody," the other suggested. "Mebby yer seed er rale shore nuff live man?"

"Sho', yer goin' crazy, man. Yer know ther hain't nobody erbout here nowhar. Ther kain't be."

"Why kain't ther be?"

"Becase ther hain't no place fer 'im ter hide."

"Humph! couldn't he hide behind that big rock easy 'nuff?"

"Wal, he mout do that, but I reckon it hain't likely es he would."

"We mout look, anyway, an' make shore ov it."

"Yer kin ef yer want ter. I hain't ergone ter do no sich foolishness."

Jack, who had all the time shrunk back farther into the shadow of the stone, listening, with bated breath, to every word the

men had spoken, hailed this last announcement with genuine pleasure, as may be readily supposed.

While he was yet pondering this matter and wondering what fate had in store for him, he was startled by the sound of footsteps behind him.

Some one was approaching the cave from the west, and, in order to reach it, must pass the spot where Jack stood.

Nearer and nearer the footsteps approached. Oh, fortunate, indeed, for Jack, that the night was so dark that objects could not be seen six inches from the eye, else he must have been discovered and his doom fixed. As it was, the man came slowly on, feeling his way cautiously, for the path was narrow and there was need of the greatest caution.

Fortunate was it for Jack that the waters down below kept up such a roaring and splashing, else his very breathing, soft as it was, must have directed the man's attention.

Directly the man came even with the crouching figure. He was feeling his way along and kept his hand on the stone, and Jack was forced to stoop lower to let the hand pass above him. It was a critical moment, and one in which Jack neither moved nor breathed.

"Darn the luck," the man muttered, as a stone gave way beneath his foot, and he came very near losing his balance and going over the precipice, "I never seed sich er night as this. Darker'n a nigger picnic."

He spoke low, but he was so close to Jack that he heard him plainly. Indeed, he would have heard him if he had spoken in the lowest whisper, and it is doubtful if he could not almost have heard him, though he had done no more than think.

"This is er cussed night fer shore," the man went on, stopping within six inches of Jack and fumbling about his clothes. "Reckon er feller could strike er match an' see 'is way er leetle better."

Jack's heart beat fast when the man drew a match across the stone. Would it light? And if it did what would be the result when he was discovered there? The answer to the last question was easily found. What had been the fate of the other man who was found there? His could not be better, for he was known, and his business was known.

One, two, three, four matches were tried, but none of them lighted, and all that time Jack waited with the determination that if one did light he would push the man over the precipice and make a run for his life.

At last the man passed on, and coming to the corner of the rock, was lighted along the ledge of stone to the mouth of the cave by the little spark of light that lay buried back in the mountain.

"Who's that?" he heard a voice demand in a low tone accompanied by the click of a pistol.

"Hank Duncan, you fool," the other replied. "Who else d'yer 'spect it ter be comin' here sich er night?"

"Sich er night is when they're most apt ter come, mebbey."

"Mebby it is, but I reckon not."

CHAPTER XIX.

A DARING LEAP.

"Any news, Hank?" one of the men asked.

"Yas, there is," Hank replied in a tone that showed unmistakably that whatever the news was, it was not pleasant or agreeable news.

"What hev yer hearn?"

"Wal, fer one thing I hearn that that feller stopped up thar at ole Tucker's hain't left ther mountings er tall, but is sumer's erbout in this yere section now."

"Is that er fack?"

"Course it's er fack, er I wouldn't said it wuz so."

"Whar's he stoppin'?"

"Dunno."

"Then how'd yer know he's here?"

"I reckon he hain't here. I wush he wuz, fer then we'd soon git rid ov 'im fer once an' all."

"I mean how yer know he's in ther mountings?"

"Seed 'im."

"You seed 'im?"

"Yas, I seed 'im."

"Whar?"

"Up erlong ther bench jes beyant old Parker's clearin'. It wuz jest afore ther storm come up, an' when I seed him er

swingin' erlong down ther road from ole Tucker's, I hid berhind er lawg an' waited fer 'im."

"Whyn't yer drap 'im?"

"Drap 'im? Wal, that's jest whut I wuz figgerin' on doin', an' I waited tell he got almost even with me, an' then jest as I sighted an' put my hand on ther trigger ter pull it, sumpin' hit me squar on ther head an' laid me out senseless fer er good bit I guess. Anyhow when I come erround ergin, it wuz pourin' down rain, an' I wuz lyin' in er sluice er water, an' ther feller wuz clean gone to no tellin' whar."

"Whut wuz it hit yer?"

"It wuz er rock, but I dunno no mor'n you do who throwed it."

"It warn't ther feller, I reckon?"

"No, it warn't him, case he didn't hev no rock in his hand, an' asides he couldn't er done it 'thout me seein' 'im."

"Wal, that seems sorter quare, don't it?"

"It don't seem no quarer ter you ner it does ter me, I judge."

"No, I 'low it don't. But who d'yer think could 'a' done it?"

"I kajin't make out no head nor tail ter it. It's all er puzzle ter me."

And Jack, listening in his corner behind the stone, admitted that it was all a puzzle to him; but nevertheless he felt thankful in his heart to the unknown person who had so opportunely and so unsuspectingly saved his life.

To be sure, he could not form the least idea of who his benefactor could be; but some way Tucker and Jerry Jenkins came before him, and he felt a strong inclination to associate one of them with the act.

"Look yere, Hank," one of the men went on, "don't it 'pear some to you like that thar feller's puttin' in er leetle too much up thar at Tucker's?"

"I dunno es he's been thar sence that day we run him down ther range—ther day he fotch ther doc."

"I dunno nuther; but he mout er been goin' thar every day es fer es we know. He mout er been thar ter-day."

"He mout, that's er fack. But what of it?"

"Wal, nothin' ov it; only ef he's goin' up thar, mouten't it be sorter likely that ole Rile is actin' sorter o' shabby 'uth us, an' heppin' ther feller out? An' ef he's a-doin' that, mouten't it be sorter likely that it warn't nobody but ole Tucker who throwed ther rock?"

"Wal, now, ef that's whut yer tryin' ter reason out, yer right smart off yer base, ole man, fer I know it warn't ole Tucker er tall."

"How d'yer know that, Hank?"

"I know it, because I know Rile warn't thar. I wuz down ther ther store ter-day, an' Tucker war thar, an' me'n him come back together ter ther forks, an' I come on an' ther way, an' he went on home."

"An' yer shore he didn't turn back an' foller yer?"

"Course I am, fer not five minutes afore I wuz hit I heerd ole Tucker shoot 'way over ercrost ther mounting."

"Wal, in co'se it couldn't er been him then. But who ther devil it could er been, stumps my 'taters."

"It 'ud stump anybody's 'taters, I 'low. I've reasoned ther hull derned thing out es I come erlong, an' ther only way I kin fix it is that ther must be two o' them spies in these yere mountings."

"Wal, now, that's jest erbout whut they air, Hank, an' I tell yer of that's ther case, we gotter keep our eyes out purty derned sharp."

"I reckon I know that 'bout's well es you do."

"Yas, s'pose yer do, fer er fack. An' yer hain't no ijee o' whar that feller's er stayin'?"

"No; but we gotter fin' out purty soon."

"Dunno which way he tuck arter yer seed 'im up thar?"

"No; but it stands ter reason he come on down this way, don't it, when he wuz headed this way?"

Jack's heart beat a little faster.

"Yas, sure 'nuff, it does. But whar could he a-gone in this direction?"

"Wal, that's jest whut I been er wonderin' erbout an' tryin' ter figger out. They hain't but one path 'twixt whar I seed 'im an' this, a-leadin' off ter ther river, an' that's ther one that goes down by ole Perry Jackson's. Now he didn't go down that road, fer I kep' er lookout fer it, an' I seed that er stone es big es er barn hed rolled down an' stopped right ercrost it, an' they warn't no possible chance fur 'im ter go down thar. An' yer know yer-

self he couldn't er gone down nowhar else, an', fer that matter, he couldn't er gone up, could he?"

"No, he couldn't."

"Then thar's no two ways erbout it, boys. He's sumer's nigh this place right now, an' while he hain't nowise likely ter find us out, he's purty derned liable ter git er leetle too close fer comfort."

Jack's heart began to thump, and his hair stood up. It was beginning to appear pretty apparent that he was in a close place, to say the least, and that unless the moonshiners soon gave him a chance to retreat he would be discovered and killed.

While he was yet waiting and listening, one of the men said:

"Dan seed er feller standin' in front here erwhile ergo, but he 'lowed it wuz er ghost er ha'nt er sumpin'."

"Ghost er ha'nt be derned," Hank replied; "ef yer seed anything it wuz that feller, an' he's 'round here now sumer's."

"He couldn't be here nowhar lessen he wuz behind that rock."

"He may be thar."

Jack's heart stood still, and his blood ran cold in his veins.

"Git er light an' we'll soon see ef he's thar," Hank commanded.

"Oh, why didn't I push him over the precipice?" he thought.

However, he tarried not to be found, but with one swift jump he cleared the bank, and went down, down to the foaming, tossing water sixty feet below.

CHAPTER XX.

OVER THE FALLS.

It was a fearful leap for life or death, and few men would have made it and escaped.

But when near the bottom, Jack struck a point of soft dirt that projected a foot or two at that point, thus breaking the force of his descent, and throwing him into the water safely and soundly.

The river was roaring and tossing, and full from the recent heavy rain.

On its bosom floated great logs, limbs and chunks, until they almost formed a solid raft the entire width of the stream.

Jack having retained his consciousness and wits from the first, soon made himself secure to one of these floating logs, and was thus safe from drowning, at least.

It was a wild, weird night, and Jack's surroundings were far from pleasant, yet as he floated down the river with the swift current, he recalled all that had transpired, and felt thankful for his seemingly miraculous escape.

There was no possibility of him escaping from his position, for in the intense darkness of the night no one could have found a way to the shore through the mass of floating timber, and it would have required more than ordinary human strength and endurance to have successfully fought against the boiling, rolling current.

Jack was already weak from exposure and fatigue, and wisely decided to maintain his position on the log, and drift with the current into the new day and whatever it brought him.

He was not at peace within himself by any means, for while the outcome of his adventure was far from settled, and he realized that at any moment he might be dashed from his uncertain bark, his mind was busy with the events of the last few hours, and he was troubled lest his lucky discovery of the moonshiners' den might prove valueless after all.

He had floated on for nearly half an hour, when he noticed that the roaring of the waters increased.

At first he took no special notice of this, but as minute after minute passed, and the roaring grew louder and hoarser and stronger, he began to wonder at it.

Another ten minutes passed and the roar became deafening, and then the truth dawned on Jack's mind. He was nearing the falls.

"My God!" he whispered, "must I go through that, too?"

Laying himself flat on the log he locked his arms and legs around it, and thus prepared he braced himself with all the fortitude he could command, and waited for the end—whatever it might be.

Nearer and nearer to the falls, and louder and hoarser grew the awful roaring.

He knew that the descent would be rapid, and that in the swashing, swirling waters below he would be lost forever unless he could maintain his hold on the log, and he knew that would be difficult.

"Oh, God!" he cried, "have mercy on me!"

Then the log gave a perceptible jerk, followed immediately by a quick, sliding motion, and a moment later it was over the falls, pitching and swirling in the rolling waters.

After rolling, tumbling, and tossing about for a few seconds it shot out and away again, still bearing its burden of human freight.

Jack righted himself directly, none the worse for his descent, though his escape was indeed narrow, and after almost another hour had passed he was rejoiced to see the eastern sky streaked with the first light of the dawn.

Shortly he was hailed from the shore by some one, and looking out in that direction he saw a man coming toward him in a boat.

After the lapse of a few minutes the boat reached him, and he sprang into it and was pulled away to the shore.

"By Jacks! young man," the rescuer cried in a sharp, rapid voice, "you wuz inter it, warn't you?"

"If you mean the water, I guess I was," Jack replied.

"How fur'd ye come?"

"I have no idea how far. Several miles above the falls, though, I judge."

"By Jacks! stranger, you didn't come over the falls, did ye?"

"Yes, I did."

"Wal, by Jacks!"

"Say, it's a little too uncomfortable to remain out here in this condition. Isn't there a house somewhere close? I'm about frozen."

"Why, by Jacks! mister, o' co'se they's a house. I fergot all erbout yer bein' wet. Come erlong. I live right over thar in ther timber. How'd yer git inter it?"

"Into what?"

"Inter ther river, by Jacks!"

"Fell in."

"By Jacks!"

"Considerable rain, wasn't it?"

"Bet it war. Never seed sich er rain sence I been yere, by Jacks!"

"What is your name, my friend?"

"My name? Oh, Jim Fifer, by Jacks! An' now whut mout be your name, mister?"

"My name is Marvin."

"Uh, huh. Wal, here's my house. Jest come in an' make yerse'f at home."

Jack did as requested, and entering the little boarded-up shanty, was soon making himself as comfortable as possible before a blazing fire. His rescuer and host was hospitality personified, and did everything in his power to make Jack comfortable, in the meantime showing an unquestionable desire to learn all about his guest's adventures during the night.

He asked innumerable questions and made innumerable comments, all calculated to lead Marvin into an explanation, and all backed up with his favorite expression, "by Jacks." It did really appear as if "by Jacks" was as much a part of Jim Fifer as was a leg or an arm, and he would probably have been as much lost if he had been denied the use of that expression as a fish would be cut off from water.

Anyhow, his talk was thickly studded with it, and if it did not weight down one or both ends of his sentences, it was found clenching them down in the center.

As Jack sat by the fire warming himself up and partaking of a warm lunch, he had an opportunity to note the "get-up" and appearance of his host.

He was a wiry, well-built man, evidently thoroughly honest.

After a little conversation, he discovered that Fifer knew the Tuckers and that Lizzie or Bet was related to him.

This made Jack more communicative, and he soon told Fifer what his mission in that part of the country was.

Fifer could tell little about the still, but promised to help the boy in any way that he could.

CHAPTER XXI.

FACING DEATH.

Jack bid his new friend adieu and began his journey back through the mountains toward Perry Jackson's, and as he slowly ascended the path that led by a winding course up the steep mountainside, he began to recall all that had passed within the last two days, and among the throng of remembrances that

floated up none stood out so boldly and so prominently as his last interview with Lizzie Tucker.

He passed on mile after mile, and it was near the middle of the afternoon when the path he was following led down a slight decline and ran for some distance along the edge of a steep precipice, at the foot of which a little valley stretched away a hundred yards or so to where the mountain rose again. It was simply a little basin comprising less than two acres of land almost entirely shut in by mountains with only a narrow inlet at one side, and an equally narrow outlet at the other side for the tiny stream that flowed through on its way from the mountain springs to the river.

It was a picturesque spot, and Jack, in his meditative mood, was struck with it, and stopped to enjoy the beauty of its surroundings and scenery.

He had remained standing on the brink of the precipice for five minutes, perhaps, when he was disturbed from his dreams by a slight noise among the leaves and brush back of him. Glancing quickly around he hastily and eagerly scanned the whole side of the mountain above him, but nothing rewarded his view.

"A squirrel or rabbit, I guess," he muttered as he turned back, and in a moment all thought of the noise, or of any danger that might attend it, passed out of his mind.

Since leaving Fifer's, Jack had not seen a single sign of human habitation, and so far as outward appearances went the whole country for miles in every direction might have been in its original and unsettled state. It is true there was a little used path leading through the mountains, but it might have been worn out by the animals of the forest. He had taken a "high cut" that ran by a more rugged course and through a rougher section of country, instead of going the plainer road that followed up the valley.

It was a desolate spot, and as Jack stood gazing down into the valley, that was already shrouded in the solemn shades of evening, a sense of loneliness crept over him, and an unaccountable sadness settled down on his spirits, and his mind wandered away to other times and other scenes.

So deep had he fallen in this reverie, and so lost was he to his surroundings and the present, that he saw and heard nothing that passed around him.

It was while in the midst of these dreams, and while peering absent-mindedly down into the thickening gloom, that he was startled and aroused by the appearance of a man emerging from a clump of low trees on the opposite side of the valley.

The figure moved slowly, stealthily toward Jack's position, two or three times halting to listen and cast furtive glances around.

Jack drew his pistol and waited for the issue, having no doubt but that another attempt was to be made on his life.

But in this he was mistaken.

The first figure reached the middle of the valley, and for a moment lifting his head, so that Jack looked down on his face, revealed to the latter his identity.

When the first figure looked up and Jack caught a good view of his face, he was surprised to find that it was none other than Tucker.

And he was equally as much surprised when he saw Hank Duncan steal forth in Tucker's wake, evidently intent on murdering him.

It was the work of but an instant to draw a bead on Duncan, even as he was preparing to fire on Tucker, and almost simultaneously the two weapons were discharged with such effect that, while Tucker escaped, Duncan received a ball through his right arm near the shoulder.

A minute elapsed, probably, and Jack remained in the same position looking down in the valley, when there was a sudden rustling of the leaves and bushes above him, and turning about he found himself face to face with two men with drawn revolvers.

"Curse you! we've got you this time, I reckon," one of them ground out through his teeth. "We've hunted you high an' low, an' two or three times you hev escaped us, but this time we've got you fast."

Indeed, Jack's case did seem hopeless, and he no doubt felt that his chance of escape was a slender one.

His assailants had the drop on him, and even if he made a motion to raise his pistol, they would instantly send a bullet through his brain.

"You have the advantage of me, men," Jack said after a short silence, in which his assailants had gazed into each other's faces. "You are two against one, and you have the drop on me."

"I 'low yer k'rect thar," one of the men replied, with a cold, hideous grin, "an' funder we 'low ter keep the drop on ye."

"Then you don't propose to give a man a fair chance for his life?"

"Not sech as you, we don't."

"Is it manly or brave of you to shoot a man down in cold blood, when he is powerless to offer the least particle of defense?"

"Dunno nothin' 'bout that. Reckon anything's good ernuff fer them darned spies, an' you're one ov 'em. Hain't nothin' manly er brave 'bout er sneak; an' when er feller like you comes nosin' 'roun' here an' gits hisself in er box, he needn't beg fer mercy from us. Reckon ef yer could er got us in yer power, we mout er talked erbout mercy an' all that till we wuz blue in ther face, an' it wouldn't er counted fer nothin'. Don't go ter beggin' fer us ter be easy 'uth ye, fer we've swore ter kill yer, an' we don't never go back on our word when we swar to it. We're settled on that."

"You are very much mistaken if you suppose I came here with any desire to take your lives. As a sworn officer of the government I am compelled to do my duty to the best of my ability, and as defiers of the law you merit punishment. If I wanted to murder you, I could have done so less than twenty-four hours since. I could have shot you both down in cold blood, just as you now propose to shoot me down."

"How? Where? When?"

"Never mind that. It is true, but it need not make any difference to you now. I only mention it to show you that if I had wanted your lives I could have had them."

"I don't believe you," one of the men replied; "if it wuz so you could tell whar an' when it wuz."

"You remember the story of the poor young lover who wandered into the neighborhood of your den, and being by your gang mistaken for a spy, was thrown over the mountain into the river, with a stone fastened to him, and who you sometimes see of nights with his love walking on the water, when it is dark? You remember that story, don't you?"

For an instant the two men stood looking at each other in wonder, then turning to Jack, one of them said:

"Yas, I remember it, an' I know now what you mean. You wuz there last night, hid berhind that rock, an' hearn every word that passed."

"Yes, I was there, and I heard you."

"Then, curse you, you must die, an' at once. You know too much, an' we won't be safe while they's breath in ye."

"I was there and heard what you said, but I was not there of my own choice."

"Yer wuzn't? Then what wuz ye thar fur, I'd like ter know?"

"I lost my way in the storm, and accidentally stumbled on your den. But that, of course, makes no difference to you. I was there and heard you, and that is enough to give you an excuse for killing me. But you do not need an excuse. Such red-handed assassins as you need no excuse. I am in your power, and you can do as you like with me, but remember there is a law in this country, and the time will come when you will feel its power and have to answer for your crimes."

Jack spoke earnestly and warmly, not that he had any idea of touching the men's hearts or affecting their sensibilities in the least, but he felt such an abhorrence of them and felt so sure that sooner or later justice must overtake them, that it was a relief for him to speak his mind before the end came, which he was certain would come soon.

The men listened until he was done, then, breaking into a laugh that sounded sufficiently cold and cruel to make Jack shiver, one of the said:

"That's all well ernuff ter talk 'bout, young feller, but yer know ketchin' comes afore hangin', ha, ha-aw!"

And at the same instant the man lifted his pistol, and coolly taking aim at Jack's breast, said:

"Tain't no use in talkin' 'bout it no more. Yer hed time ernuff, an' now say yer pra'rs. One, two, three, ready—"

CHAPTER XXII.

UNEXPECTED HELP.

"Ready," the man repeated with his finger on the trigger.

Jack felt that the end had indeed come, and that there was no possible hope of escape. Yet, as he looked on the pistol that would soon send his soul out of the world, his form remained

firm and unshaken; his face, though a shade paler than its wont, showed no trace of fear, and his eyes looked all the defiance that it was possible for eyes so soft and dreamy to look.

Even the murderous mountaineers must have felt a sort of admiration for the man who could so coolly face death; but their feeling of admiration was not sufficient to alter their purpose or cause them for a moment to hesitate in their diabolical work.

"Ready?"

The word had barely escaped the man's lips when a heavy hand was laid on his shoulder and he was jerked back to the earth.

Momentarily Jack was surprised beyond the power of action, so suddenly and unexpectedly had this last comer appeared on the scene.

But quickly recovering his self-possession, he drew forth his revolver, knocked the other assassin down with one blow, and quickly disarmed them both.

Then extending his hand to his deliverer, he said impetuously: "Tucker, you have saved my life, and I have not words to thank you. If I have misjudged you in the past, I take it all back, and swear friendship to you now and forever."

"One good turn deserves another, I reckon," Tucker replied; "an' I 'low it 'ud er been sorter dern shabby in me ter a stood off thar an' seed yer killed arter yer fixed ole Hank jest now an' saved my hide. I reckon ef anybody orter ax pardon an' swar frien'ship, it orter be me."

"Well, enough of that now. I have these two fellows on my hands, and I must get them out of here and put them in a place of safe keeping."

"It won't take long ter do that, ef yer er mind ter act sensible," Tucker replied.

"How is that?"

"I 'low yer orter know whar they'd be safest."

Jack understood Tucker's meaning, and shaking his head, replied:

"No; I couldn't think of that, Tucker. It would never do. They must be turned over to the law."

"Law be derned! Law hain't nothin' down here; an' ef yer want them fellers ter git justice yer got ter deal it out ter them yerse'f. 'Tain't no use er monkeyin' bout the law. Ye got 'bout ther only law es counts in this section right har in yer hand."

Jack lifted his pistol and glanced at it, at the same time shaking his head.

"No; while these cowards deserve such treatment, I will not stain my hands with their blood. They are prisoners, and it is my duty to deliver them up to the law, to suffer whatever punishment it puts on them."

Tucker was not pleased with this mild way of dealing with his old-time comrades and friends, but now his inveterate enemies, but he refrained from saying anything further, and stood silently by looking on while Jack brought forth a pair of handcuffs and prepared to place them on the wrists of the men, who all this time lay flat on the ground as if not yet recovered from the shocks they had received.

He bent over the tallest one, who lay as if his life was on the point of going out, and lifting his arm, was in the act of springing the bracelet on him, when, like a flash, the powerful man sprang to his feet, giving Jack a vicious shove as he did so, which sent him staggering back to the brink of the precipice and over it and down—down to the very bottom. At the same moment the other sprang to his feet, and the two disappeared in the bushes, receiving a parting salute from Tucker's gun as they did so.

"Drat the luck," Tucker muttered, as he stood momentarily upset by the sudden turn affairs had taken. "Drat the luck, why warn't I keepin' my eyes open so's ter be ready fer them cusses? I mont a-knowed them wuz 'possumin' an' waitin' fer er chance ter git erway. Shucks, ef that feller'd er acted sensible an' laid 'em out fer good while he had 'em, it 'ud been more like business. 'Tain't no use er foolin' 'uth law an' sech nonsense in these yere parts. Ther sensible way is jest ter drap 'em."

Having delivered himself of this piece of good logic, Tucker took up his gun and looked over it carefully, then went on muttering:

"All derned foolishness from fust to last. Law may do in some places, but down here it hain't no more nor wind. That air's our law," tapping his gun, "and when she speaks she means business. They hain't no goin' back on it, er monkeyin' out ov

it, ef she is p'inted right. Law! Dern ther law! Yer jest naterly got ter 'drap 'em.'"

Having by this time spoken his sentiments to his own satisfaction, Tucker began to recall Jack to mind, and wonder what his fate had been.

"Mashed ter pieces, I reckon. Legs an' arms an' neck's all broke. 'Pears like some folks is natrel-borned fools from the fust, an' don't know nothin'. Ef he'd had any sense he'd er 'drapped 'em.'"

Tucker had spent a good many years in the mountains, and had in his numerous hunting expeditions traversed the country from one end to the other, and consequently knew almost every path, nook and corner in it.

And on this occasion he was at no loss for a way by which he could descend to the valley.

Cautiously, stealthily, creeping along, he finally reached the bottom, and keeping a sharp lookout for his enemies, at last reached the spot where Jack had fallen, and where he now lay in an unconscious condition.

"Air ye dead, young feller?" Tucker asked, as he lifted Jack's hand, and turned him so the light fell full in his face.

Jack's lips moved as if in speech, but not a sound came from them.

Tucker, putting his ear down, asked:

"Whut wuz it?"

"Water," he barely discerned.

Tucker realized that every moment they remained there they were in imminent danger, since the moonshiners were liable at any moment to return to finish their work if it was not already complete, so hastening to the creek he brought some water in his hat, and giving Jack a swallow of it, dashed the balance in his face, and taking him in his arms disappeared in the bushes, and stopped not until he reached the opposite side of the valley.

Here he came to a little cave seemingly hewn out of the stones, with an entrance scarce wide enough to admit a man's body.

Laying Jack down, Tucker went in first, pulling his companion in after him, who by this time was fully restored to his senses, but not to the use of his limbs.

"Thar yer air, safe an' sound," Tucker remarked, as he stowed Jack away on an old blanket in the corner—"leastwise safe, whar yer sound or not. Reckon yer purty bad hurt?"

"I don't know," Jack replied; "I feel pretty badly used up."

"Try yer legs an' see ef any ov 'em is broke."

Jack did as requested and found that his legs were not broken, though both of his ankles appeared to be sprained, causing him considerable pain when he tried to move them.

"Wal, that's good fer ye, an' as yer neck hain't broke, ner yer arms ner nothin'. I 'low yer'll soon pull through all right ernuff. An' yer safe here—es safe es kin be. It hain't no likely place ter stay, but it beats nothin' mouty bad, an' lays it over ther grave all holler. Don't yer think so?"

"Yes, I expect it does," Jack replied, rather faintly.

"That's ther way I look at it. Say, doggone my buttons, mister, reckon yer'll act sensible next time, an' when yer git yer claws on them fellers drap 'em."

CHAPTER XXIII.

JACK'S LONG WAIT.

The cave into which Tucker had conveyed his charge was a rather narrow, dark place, but as it was cool and apparently dry and clean, Jack experienced no discomfort from his enforced stay there.

He was quite seriously hurt, and fatigue, excitement and the terrible fall combined to weaken him and cause him to feel the need of some sustenance. So turning to Tucker, he said:

"It would be impossible to get any food here, I suppose?"

"Why, goshamity, mister, no. I got er bite er grub stowed erway here, though I dunno es you'd keer fer it. It hain't much, but I reckon ef er feller's hungry ernuff he could manage ter swaller er-leetle ov it."

As he spoke Tucker went over into another corner and began fumbling about in a bag in search of something, and instantly there came before Jack's mind the remembrance of that first night in the Ozarks and the meal of corn bread, bacon and onions he had partaken of at Tucker's house.

No doubt Tucker would serve the same fare to him now, and

while he was weak and hungry, he felt that he could not bolt such provisions.

However, in a short time Rile returned with something entirely different. A morsel of fried squirrel done to a turn, a slice of excellent bread and some other little knickknacks calculated to tempt the most fastidious.

"This is some o' Bet's doin's," Tucker explained, as he lay the things out on a tin plate before Jack. "Bet's er monstrous good gal, mister, ef I do say it myself, an' she's er power o' comfort ter me. I don't see how I'd got erlong all these years sence her mother died 'thoughten her."

Jack's heart quickened as he listened, and he ate heartily of the fare, for the knowledge that Bet made it was sufficient to make it palatable even if it had lacked anything within itself.

He longed to talk of Bet, for to him at that time no other possessed such interest, but he restrained himself, and instead asked:

"How does all this happen, Tucker?"

"All what?" Tucker asked in turn.

"How does it happen that you were out here this evening, and that Duncan was attempting your life, and all the rest?"

"Wal, ter make it short an' to ther p'int, ole Hank an' his gang hes been sorter s'picious o' me ever sence yer stayed up thar ter my house that night, and yer know with them thar fellers s'picion goes er long ways. Wal, yisterday, you know, you wuz up thar ergain, an' someway they found it out, an' that sot their s'picious way up, an' they jest made up their minds, I guess, that es I warn't no pertic'lar use ter 'em nohow, they'd es well make shore ov it an' jes' put me outen ther way. Wal, I knowed they wuz somethin' a-brewin', so I've been keepin' er skinned eye out all erlong, so ter-day when ole Hank an' ernuther 'n ov 'em come er ridin' up ter ther cabin, I seed 'em afore they got too nigh, an' I lit out. They seed me es I went, an' gunter shoot at me purty dinged lively, but I kep' er goin' tell I reached this place. I didn't know they'd follered, though, tell yer popped ole Hank down thar. Yer know ther rest es well's I do, I reckon."

"Yes, I know the rest. But how did you happen to bring provisions with you?"

"Wal, I wuz figgerin' some on goin' er huntin' fer er two er three days' ja'nt over on ther Gasconade, an' Bet she'd fixed up some grub fer me ter take erlong. So when I started off sorter suddint-like this mornin', she handed me ther bag with it in, an' not knowin' nuthin' much 'bout whut I wuz doin' I tuck it an' fotched it erlong. Arter I'd been in here two er three hours, an' didn't see ner hear nothin' o' nobody, I cacklerated them fellers hed guv me up an' gone back, an' I slipped out down thar ter git a drink, an' the fust thing I knowed I seed yer up thar on ther mounting, and the next thing I knowed you shot, and then I seed ole Hank a-lyin' thar, an' them two other fellers a-gittin' then drap on ye. Wal, I knowed whut they'd do, so I hustled up ther mounting an' helped ter save ye; but I'm dinged sorry yer didn't drap 'em."

"I expect I ought to have dropped them," Jack replied, more to conciliate the old man than anything else, "and if I ever get another chance at them I think I shall."

"Now yer talkin', mister. Don't fool 'round with ther law, but 'drap 'em."

"Tucker, do you think we are safe here?"

"Bet we are."

"But those men may come back. Hank Duncan may not be badly hurt, and he may be lurking around here yet waiting for a chance to 'drop us.'"

"No danger o' that. Them fellers hain't nowise anxious ter be shot at, an' they hain't goin' ter take no chances on monkeyin' 'round in here when they know we air watchin' fer 'em. Not much they hain't."

"Well, you know them better than I do," Jack replied, "and since I can't go away from here, I had as well make up my mind at once to accept the situation with as much grace as possible."

"Reckon yer had. Say, afore ye go any furdur I want ye ter un'erstand that I'm yer friend. Yer know I told ye I wuz from the fust."

"Yes, I remember, but while I do not doubt it now, I did doubt it then."

"Yas, an' yer hed reasons to, I jedge. I never liked them derned onnery cusses, but I wuz erfeerd ov 'em, an' I sent 'em word that fust night 'cause I knowed ef I didn't they'd find out you wuz thar an' they'd kill me. Bet she went 'cause she knowed

they'd kill me. But yer see I hain't gained nothin' by it, an' sence I'm inter it with ye I'll stick ter yer till ther end."

"I believe you, Tucker, and since I have unintentionally brought this trouble on you, I'll do all I can to help you out of it."

So they shook hands on the compact, and neither had a doubt of the honesty and good intentions of the other.

It was already night by this time, and Tucker announced his intention of returning home.

"You will not take the risk of going back there to-night?" Jack protested.

"Yas, I'll hev ter go, an' asides, they hain't no resk in it."

"You may meet those men."

"Not likely to, I reckon. I know this yere country a leetle better'n any o' them derned scamps knows it, an' I reckon I know whar ter go an' how ter go so's ter leave 'em ef they air watchin'."

"Is it necessary that you should go?"

"Wal, I orter go."

"I'd rather you wouldn't, Tucker; but of course you know your own business best."

"I hate ter leave ye here erlone, Jack," Tucker replied, calling his companion by name for the first time, "but yer'll git erlong well ernuff, I jedge; and asides, it can't be helped. I hafter go, an' that's ther end on it."

"Don't mind me," Jack replied. "I shall do well enough, and then you'll not be gone long. But be careful."

"Oh, I'll be keerful ernuff," Tucker said, as he passed out.

The first thought that came to Jack when he was alone was:

"Would Tucker ever return, and if not, what would be his destiny, cooped there in the cave without water or food?"

* * * * *

For two days Jack lay there, unable to move and without food or drink. He had become unconscious when Jerry and Lizzie made their way into the cave on the third day.

Jerry entered, followed immediately by his companion, who, as soon as she reached the side of her lover, threw herself down by him and cried on his bosom, again and again kissing his burning cheeks, brow and lips, saying over and over:

"My poor, poor Jack!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

REUNITED.

Tucker had left Jack fully determined to return that night, but his confidence in his ability to escape danger and make his way safely through the mountains was destined to be dashed to atoms, and it was before very long after his departure from the cave.

He had hardly reached the mountain plain and turned off by a short way that led toward his home, when he was suddenly brought to a halt by the click of a pistol and a voice crying:

"Hold, thar!"

Tucker, although surprised and momentarily disconcerted, was quick to realize his danger, and knowing that to halt meant death, he dashed away down the hillside, through the brush, and over the stones and logs that lay thick in his course, fired at in rapid succession by the two men who had attempted to halt him.

The bullets whistled close about his ears, but none of them struck him, and he would have escaped unharmed had not a stone given beneath his foot, causing him to fall head foremost some distance down the hill, breaking his collar bone, and otherwise injuring him.

The assassins did not follow, and Tucker lay there in an unconscious state all through the night, and until late in the forenoon, when he was accidentally discovered by Jerry Jenkins, who happened to pass that way and was attracted by the groans of the wounded man.

Having secured assistance, Tucker was conveyed home, where Lizzie attended him, and for three days and nights he remained in an unconscious condition.

Often he lay quite still, and for an hour not a word would escape his lips.

Then again he would break forth in wild raving, and for an hour talk in a disjointed and disconnected way, and always of Jack and the cave, and of Rowhuff's Glen.

Thus it went on day and night until the listeners had gathered enough to convince them that Jack had met with an accident, and by degrees they came to understand the whole of the situation.

The moment it was all plain to Lizzie, and she came to under-

stand that Jack was hurt and was then lying in a cave in Rowhuff's Glen, she quietly took up her bonnet and stepping toward the door, said:

"I am going to find him."

"What?" Jerry exclaimed, "not by yourself?"

"Yes, by myself."

"You can't. You don't know the way, and you couldn't never find it."

"I'll try, anyhow. I can't think of leaving him alone there to die, without making some effort to find him."

"Wal, you can't do it by yourself," Jerry replied, "an' so I'll go with you."

Lige Jones was there at the time, and promised to remain with Tucker while they were gone.

It was a long trip, and over a rugged country, and Jerry feared that the girl could never make it, but, wrought up by excitement and anxiety, she did make it, and not only that, but led Jerry a lively chase on the way.

Jack was in a desperate condition when they found him, and his features and his swollen tongue told unmistakably of the horrible suffering he had undergone.

But, with water and nourishment, he soon began to revive, and in a short time his thoughts began to flow, and his senses returned.

The first object that his eyes fell on, when he awoke to life again, was Lizzie, and for several moments he lay looking at her, and wondering if his experiences and sufferings were real, or if he had only been in bad dreams.

But he was soon assured that it was no dream, and the happenings of the past two days were related to him.

For a long time after that he lay silently holding Lizzie's hand, and she sat looking into the thickening gloom and dreaming of the future, and picturing it out in the bright colors hope and requited love gave it.

Tired and weak, Jack soon fell into a deep sleep, and all through the long night Lizzie sat by his side, holding his hand, and praying for his speedy recovery and safe departure from the mountains.

The morning light was just beginning to peep timidly into the cave, streaking the thick gloom of the night, when footsteps were heard approaching along the mountainside, followed shortly by the appearance of Jerry, who had been outside for some hours.

"I wuz gone a leetle longer'n I s'pected," Jerry said, by way of apology, when he had got inside, and deposited a huge bundle on the floor. "I thought we might hev ter stay here a good spell, so I figgered out as how it 'ud be best to fetch a few traps along o' me. Thar's some blankets an' tricks ter sleep on, an' here's er lot o' grub to sort o' brace us up tell we kin do better. Yer see I hed to go 'way 'round by home ter git these ere fixens, an' it's er right smart step, an' that's whut made me so long erbout gittin' back."

Jerry rattled on thus, and by his voice and fidgeting manner betrayed the fact that something had happened, and that he was merely trying to gain time, and prevent as long as possible the question which he knew Lizzie would ask.

Lizzie saw his meaning, and stopping him, said, in a voice trembling with anxiety:

"Oh, Jerry, something has happened. What is it? Tell me quick."

"How d'ye know?" he asked in reply, trying in his awkward, blundering way to pave his course before him. "How d'yer know somethin' has happened?"

"I know it. I can see it in your actions. I can read it in your face."

"Yas, somethin' has happened, shore 'nuff, but you mustn't take it too hard. How has Jack got on through the night?"

Jerry switched off thus, hoping for a little more time, and in some way having a vague sort of idea that by mixing matters up he would lessen the pang that his final announcement must bring to the girl's heart.

"He has done well," the girl said in reply; "but do not trifle with me, Jerry. Tell me what has happened. Is poor pap—has anything happened to him?"

Jerry nodded "yes."

"And he is dead?" she asked eagerly.

Jerry nodded in the affirmative.

She broke down and wept, and was still weeping when Jack awoke.

"You hev had a very good night of it, Mr. Jack," Jerry remarked, endeavoring once more to get away from the subject that he had found so disagreeable.

"Yes, I rested well, Jerry; but what is the matter with Lizzie?"

Jerry stammered and blundered in his effort to reply, but he was too confused to make himself understood, and he was greatly relieved when the girl broke in, saying:

"Oh, Jack, he is dead—he is dead. Pap is dead, and I wasn't with him."

"It's lucky you warn't, Bet," Jerry hastened to say, "fer if you hed been you'd 'a' been killed, too."

Jerry, after all his attempts to avoid giving a shock, after all his efforts to break the news softly, had in an unguarded moment blurted out the worst, so there was nothing left for him but to tell the whole sad story, which he was reluctant to do; but Lizzie, having recovered from the first terrible shock, insisted on hearing it all, and Jack, thinking it best that she should hear it, motioned Jerry to go on.

After leaving the cave Jerry had gone directly to Tucker's, and arrived there in due time to find the house burned down and only a few smoldering coals and embers left. While he was yet looking about the place some one came softly and unobserved behind him, and touching his arm, whispered in his ear:

"Come with me."

He turned about to find Lige Jones there, and followed him into the bushes quite a way from the spot. When they stopped in a dark, secluded place, Jones, speaking in a whisper, said:

"Them devils is broke loose in yearnest an' air scourin' the mountains high an' low. They come in thar purty soon after dark, drove me out, killed Tucker, and then set the cabin afire. The woods is alive with 'em now, an' I know they have swore to hunt the mountains from one eend to t'other to fin' that detective feller an' kill 'im."

"I axed Jones," Jerry went on, after narrating the particulars of the circumstances, "ef he reckoned they knowed anything 'bout whar Jack wuz, an' he said he 'lowed not, but from whut he could gether o' ther talk, they wuz pooty well settled in their min's that he wuz summers in ther mountains yit; fer ef he'd ever gone out they didn't know nothin' ov it, an' he reckoned they wuz keepin' a purty sharp lookout on every side fer 'im."

"Whar'd they see 'im last?" I axed. "Did yer gether that?"

"Yes," says he, "I did. I 'low the last they seed ov 'im wuz over ter Rowhuff's Glen t'other day when he shot ole Hank Duncan through the arm."

"Wuz ole Hank with them to-night?" I axed.

"Yes," says Lige, "he wuz 'long o' the gang, but he hadn't no use ov 'is arm, so I reckon that feller must er popped 'im tolerable smart."

Jack and Lizzie waited in silence until Jerry had finished the narrative. Then Jack was the first to speak.

"I've brought all this on by coming here."

"No, no," Lizzie cried, "don't blame yourself, for it is not your fault."

At that moment the sound of voices reached the cave, and Jerry, taking up his gun, said:

"They are coming."

And indeed they had come, for Jerry, lying at the entrance to the cave, looked out at the narrow aperture, and all through the day saw them at frequent intervals pass and repass, sometimes within a few feet of him, and sometimes on the mountain-side opposite.

How often that day, as he lay with his gun ready for immediate use in case of an emergency, did he find it hard to resist the temptation to "drap" the bloody-handed outlaws, as they passed so near him!

"Will they find us?" Lizzie asked.

"Reckon it ain't hardly likely," Jerry replied, "for it hain't no easy matter to fin' this yere hole, even when er feller's lookin' fer it. An' ef they did fin' us, I 'low they wouldn't never git to us—not s'long es ole Betsey's able ter talk, nohow"—nodding toward his gun—"an' I 'low she's good fer all ther is ov 'em. I reckon ef they found us an' tuck er notion ter come in, the ole gal 'ud sorter discourage 'em when she 'gun ter gab. Say, I'd love ter drap one ov 'em."

"But you must not do it, Jerry, for then we'd be found, and that would be the end of the matter with us."

"Shucks! I could kill ever' darned one o' ther rascals afore they could tech us. I'd like to see one ov 'em crawl in yere while ole Betsey's able ter speak. I tell ye they'd hev ter crawl over ther ole gal's body afore they'd git to us."

"Yes, I know that," Jack replied, "but you haven't thought how easy it would be for them to build up a fire just outside there, and smoke or roast us out."

"By jux, I hain't never thought a breath o' that. They could do it jest es easy es nothin', an' I reckon ef they let us erlone we'd best let them erlone."

Jack rapidly regained his strength, and by constant bathing, the pain and soreness was soon subdued, and his limbs restored to their natural condition. Jerry had brought a goodly supply of provisions, and every night when he went out he brought in other necessary articles, and altogether they got along very well for prisoners in an underground dungeon.

Lizzie sincerely mourned the fate of her father, and begged time and again to go to his grave, but Jack would not allow her to expose herself to such great danger, and persuaded her from it.

Thus a week passed, and it becoming evident that the moonshiners had given up search for Jack, it was decided to leave the cave.

Jack emerged from the cave, and with Lizzie walking by his side, followed after Jerry, and in due time arrived safely at the main road leading down in the direction of Fifer's house, where Jack had decided to take Lizzie, now that her father was dead.

"Yer'll be safe enough now," Jerry announced, "so I'll not go any farder. Glad fer Bet's sake we got out 'thout bein' molested, but I'd 'a' liked doggoned well ter drap one ov 'em."

CHAPTER XXV.

JACK STARTS FOR THE MOUNTAINS ONCE MORE.

"Jerry," Jack said, extending his hand, "I may never see you again, but I want you to bear in mind that, no matter where I am or how many years I may live, I will never, never forget you and the many kindnesses you have rendered us. And besides that, you have lost time, Jerry, and I feel that I ought to make it good to you, so if you will you may take this."

"Whut is it?" Jerry asked, eagerly eying the little parcel Jack held out.

"Open it and see," Jack replied.

Jerry took it and found a couple of gold pieces when it was unwrapped.

It was near noon when Jack and Lizzie arrived at Jim Fifer's, and were welcomed into his domicile by that somewhat eccentric individual.

"By Jacks, stranger, you've come back!" Fifer exclaimed.

"Yes, I've come back," Jack replied.

"Yer not lookin' very bloomin' jest now, by Jacks. Looks like ye mout 'a' been sick er sumpin'."

"I have been sick, Mr. Fifer, but I'm all right again."

"Uh—huh! Them mountings hain't the healthiest place a-goin', air they?"

"I hardly know. I might have been sick elsewhere just as easily."

"Yas, that's so, by Jacks! ye mout—ye mout—in co'se, to be shore. Reckon yer hain't a-goin' back no more?"

"Yes, I'm going back."

"Did ye git hurt, or suthin', up thar?"

"I'll tell you about myself after a while," Jack replied. "First, I'd like to speak with you privately a few minutes, if you please."

"Sartinly, by Jacks!"

When they had gone out and walked down to the river, Jack laid his hand on the other's shoulder, and said:

"Mr. Fifer, I believe you are an honest, straightforward, well-meaning man, and that I can trust you."

Fifer ran his hands down the bottom of his pockets, chewed his tobacco very fast, and gazed attentively into his companion's face, but made no reply.

"Now, I have come back here," Jack went on, "and I have brought that young lady up at the house with me."

"Edzactly, by Jacks!"

"And now I am going back up in the mountains to-morrow, and I am going to leave the lady here under your protection. I believe I can trust you, and you are the only man in this whole region that I know well enough to trust so far."

"Edzactly, by Jacks!"

"Now, will you promise to keep her and protect her, as if she was your own daughter, until I come back?"

"Stranger, I hain't much on makin' promises, an' sayin' I'll do this, or I'll do that, or I'll do t'other, but yer welcome ter leave the gal here ef ye want to, an' here's my hand that she'll

be treated white an' pertected es fer es I'm able. That's all I kin promise ye."

"That's all I could ask you to promise, and I believe you'll do what you say."

A short silence ensued, after which Fifer, turning to Jack, remarked:

"Looky here, stranger, I don't want ter be too officious nor nothin', an' I don't want ter nose in whar I don't b'long, but mout I ax whar ye got that gal an' whut she's a-doin' with you? Reckon it's all straight an' squar' ever' way, but at ther same time I 'low I hev er right ter ax fer a explanation."

"Indeed you have," Jack replied, "and I'll gladly give it. To begin with, I suppose you have no idea of who the girl is?"

"Not a shadder of an ijee, by Jacks."

"Well, then, she is your niece, Rile Tucker's daughter."

"By Jacks, stranger, is that so? Is she raley ole Rile's gal?"

"Yes, she is."

"Then whut's 'come o' old Tucker?"

Thereupon Jack related the whole of the circumstances pertaining to Tucker's death and everything connected with the girl and himself from that day down.

"Stranger!" Fifer exclaimed, extending his hand, "I promised to stick by the gal the best I could, an' now, by Jacks, I swar ter stan' by 'er es long as I've got er hair on my head."

"Thank you, Mr. Fifer. I was sure you would, and that is why I brought her here. I won't be gone long, and when I come back she is to go with me, and to become my wife."

Fifer gazed steadily into the river, but made no reply.

"Don't you approve of that?" Jack asked.

"Yes, I hain't nothin' to say agin' it. But if I wuz you I wouldn't go up thar no more. I tell ye, you won't gain nothin' by it. Them fellers is too many fer you, an' they're dead shore to git ye before it's done with. You're out now, an' you're safe, an' you've got a whole hide, an' a purty gal to love an' be loved by, an', by Jacks, I say keep outen them thar doggoned mountings."

Jack only shook his head.

Fifer waited a few minutes, and then went on:

"In co'se you kin an' orter to do jest as you please. It's your right an' your business, only I know it's too pesky risky, by Jacks, to suit me."

"I appreciate your good intentions, Mr. Fifer," Jack replied, "but as I told you once before, I am fully decided in this matter, and whether it be a wise thing or a foolish thing, I am going through with it to the end. And now, if anything should happen, and it should turn out that I didn't come back, I want you to see that the girl is cared for properly."

"I'll do all I kin fer 'er, mister, an' little es that is, I'll do it gladly, fer I hain't nobody else to live fer. By Jacks, stranger, I'm dinged glad o' hev'in' er chance o' doin' somethin' fer 'er, I am shore. It's er great consolation to er ole codger like me to hev somethin' ter think ov asides hisself, an' it sorter breaks up the monotony o' life."

"Yes, I understand. And now, if I should be gone longer than I anticipate, you must talk with her and invent excuses, and make her waiting as easy as possible."

"All right, mister, I'll do it, by Jacks."

"Then everything is settled, and I am ready to go back to my work."

With the advent of morning, Jack prepared to return to the mountains, and take to his work and pursue it, to what end and what result, yet remains to be told.

Lizzie did not by word make the least attempt to detain him, but there was that in her looks and manner which betrayed her secret longing, and which pleaded more eloquently than language could for him to remain.

But he kissed her tenderly, then, turning abruptly away, was soon scaling the mountainside. When he had reached the crest and was about to pass out of sight, he looked back and saw her still standing as he left her, and he asked himself:

"Shall I ever see her again?"

CHAPTER XXVI.

JACKSON REPEATS HIS PROPOSAL.

In due time Jack succeeded in reaching Perry Jackson's place. Of course Mrs. Jackson was very much surprised by his sudden and unexpected return, as also, no doubt, was Sal, though she never said as much. Old Perry was absent on a hunting ex-

pedition, so all the entertaining, and questioning, and wondering fell to Mrs. Jackson's lot.

At the end of half an hour Perry Jackson came in. As he entered the house he saw Jack sitting before him, and stopping on the threshold, he exclaimed:

"Wal, I'll be goldarned."

"How are you, Mr. Jackson?" Jack said, rising and extending his hand.

"Purty well," said Jackson. "Nothin' extry, but sorter fair ter middlin'. But I'll be goldarned, stranger, ef ye don't clean upshot me. I hain't been s'pectin' ter see ye any more in these yere parts. 'Lowed ye'd done been kilt or run outen the mountings long afore now. Whar yer been all the time?"

"Oh, I've been knocking about in the mountains."

It was late that evening when Jack walked out and stood leaning against the fence maturing his plans for the work of the next day.

He had been there, perhaps, a quarter of an hour, when old Perry Jackson approached and said:

"Stranger, yer rickolect, I jedge, the talk we had jest afore you went away?"

Jack thought he knew what the old man meant, but it was far from his purpose to encourage him, so he merely asked as coolly and unconcernedly as possible:

"What talk do you mean, Mr. Jackson?"

"Whut talk? Why, goshamity, mister, I reckon yer know es well's I do."

"We talked about several things, and you may refer to one and you may refer to another. How am I to know which you have in mind?"

"Wal, then, to be plain 'uth ye, I'll say I mean ther talk we had 'bout Sal. Yer b'ar that in min', I jedge?"

"Yes, I remember that."

"An' yer rickerlect yer promised ter let us know when yer got back whut yer wuz goin' ter do 'bout it?"

"Yes, I believe I did," Jack admitted, hesitatingly.

"Wal, yer back now, hain't ye?"

"Yes, I am back."

"An' 'cordin' ter promise I 'low yer ort ter be ready ter speak out an' say whut yer cackerlate ter do. Yer promised ter figger on it, an' I 'low yer've hed plenty o' time ter do all ther figgerin' yer'd need ter do."

"Mr. Jackson, I have, as your wife expressed it, had an 'up and go' time of it since I left here, and I have had no time or opportunity to think of anything much. So I must beg for a little more time. I'd perfer to get well through with this moonshine business before I talk about any other business."

Jack thought to propitiate the old man's feelings as far as possible, for he realized that in his present condition he could not afford to make enemies, and besides, Jackson's friendship was likely to stand him well in hand.

"Of course," he continued, "I am speaking for the good of all of us. You know I told you before that if I could ever make it convenient to marry your daughter, or rather, if I ever saw my way clear to that end, I'd do it; and now I repeat it. But understand I am not making any promises, for it is hard to tell what may turn up. Anyhow, it is best to wait a while longer."

"Wal, it'll hev ter be as yer say, stranger, but it's mouty disapp'intin' to ther gal, arter she's figgered on it so much."

"Well, we all have more or less disappointments to bear in this life, and we all have to get used to them."

So the matter dropped, and early the next day Jack rode off down the river in search of the moonshiners' den.

For the first few miles the road led along the banks of the Meramec River, through a narrow valley thickly set with wide-boughed maples and drooping elms.

It was a beautiful, retired, quiet spot, and a place in which Jack felt free of care and fear.

He very naturally enjoyed it too, after the exciting scenes he had passed through, and very naturally he felt a great relief in being once more in a situation where he could draw a free breath, and have no haunting dread of being surprised or fired on at the most unexpected moment.

He cantered along leisurely until he came to a place where the roads crossed, and where stood a little boarded-up building, which, on a nearer approach, proved to be a typical backwoods country store—a place where the small farmers and their wives from the mountains came to exchange butter, eggs, poultry, and such other marketable produce as they could "rake and

scrape up," for calico, groceries, and such other actual necessities as they could afford.

There were no customers about, and the old storekeeper sat out in front on a box, presenting anything but a merchant-prince appearance. He was a long, slender old fellow, wearing a pair of cotton overalls, held up well under his arms by a single cotton suspender, and lacking almost a foot of reaching down to his shoes, thus leaving quite a balance of soil-stained and sun-browned shanks exposed to view.

Jack's quick eye noted everything at a glance, and it was hard for him to repress a smile as he rode up and saluted the merchant with a pleasant:

"Good-morning."

"How 'r' ye?" the old man cried. "Won't ye 'light?"

"It's hardly worth while, I suppose."

"Git down—git down, stranger, an' rest a bit. Yer hain't in no great hurry, I reckon?"

"No, not particularly."

"Wal, 'light, then. I'm rale down glad ter see ye."

"I will stop for a drink of water," Jack replied, at the same time dismounting and tying his horse.

"Mout I ax, stranger," the old storekeeper asked, "whar yer hail from?"

"I am direct from Perry Jackson's. Have been stopping there recently."

"Uh, huh. But yer ain't one o' the people o' ther mountings, though, an' whar mout yer rightly b'long?"

"Oh, I live up North."

"I thought so. Whar, ef I may ax, air ye goin' now?"

"At present I am on my way down the river a few miles. I have a little matter of business to attend to down there."

It was some time before the old man spoke again, and when he did, he only said:

"Down ther river, hey?"

"Yes, down the river."

"Hev yer ever been down thar?"

"Never have."

"I thought ye hadn't."

"What made you think that?"

"Wal, I 'low ef a feller's ever been down thar once he ain't apt ter be goin' back again soon."

"Why, is there any danger in it?"

"Wel, yer see ther mout be an' ther moutn't. It all depen's."

"It all depends on what?"

"Depen's on how er feller gits erlong. Yer see, it's nothin' but tarnal swamps, all that country down thar hain't, an' ef er feller misses his way, an' gits ter windin' 'bout 'mong them woods, he's liable ter git inter a bad box ter say ther least. But ef he sticks to ther little road that thar is, he kin go 'long tolerable safe like."

"Does the road follow the river all the way down?"

"No, it don't. It does fer a mile, then it cuts out ercross the bottom, an' don't tech the river ag'in till it's gone above five mile."

This, of course, was by no means pleasant information for Jack. His course lay by the river, and by all means he must keep to the bank. It was his only hope to find the den, and if he could not follow the river down he had as well not go at all.

"See here," he said, "it is absolutely necessary for me to keep to the river, and I want to know if there is no possible chance for me to do so?"

"Wal, I wuldn't like to try it fer my part," the old man admitted, "still I don't say it kain't be done. A feller mout do it, an' he mout come out safe, an' he moutn't come out safe. I don't know as he couldn't. All I know is none uv us down yere ever keer to chance it."

"Well, I believe I'll try it. If it gets too bad for me I can easily turn back."

"S'pose yer could."

"But probably I could get along best afoot."

"It's ther only way ye kin git erlong. No horse kain't git through them brush an' vines."

"Then, if there is no objection, I will leave my horse here until I return."

"No objection, stranger, none in the world."

"Then I'll go on. I will be back within a few hours."

Jack had gone a short distance when the thought came to him that he might be able to gain some information from the mer-

chant in regard to the moonshiners, if he was approached on the subject.

He was well assured that there was nothing in common between the storekeeper and the "shiners," and that, whether anything was gained or not, nothing could be lost by approaching him on the subject. So, walking back, he said:

"Colonel, I suppose, occupying a public place as you do, you must gain a great deal of information regarding the people of the mountains. You see many of them, you know, and hear so much of their talk."

"Yas, I hear a good bit o' whut's a-goin' on."

"I was sure of that, and what I was going to ask is this: What do you know about Hank Duncan and his moonshine gang?"

"Wal, to be straight 'uth you, mister, I don't know nothin'. Leastwise whut I know is right plumb next to nothin'."

"Then you have no idea where the still is located?"

"Not a ghost uv er ijee whar it is."

"Then you can give me no information in regard to the moonshiners at all?"

"I 'low not, stranger."

"I supposed that you had been living here a good many years, and were by this time quite conversant with the section and the people."

"Wal, I've been here nigh to thirty year now, an' I am right well posted in things hereabouts, but you see we over here don't have no truck with them over yan. We go our way an' they go their way, an' we don't ax after them an' they don't ax after us."

"You know that there is a distillery somewhere over across the river?"

"I've hearn sich talk."

"Now, don't you have some suspicion of where that still is located?"

"Not er ghost er s'picion, I tell ye. It may be up the river an' it may be down the river, an' fer that matter, so fer as I know, it mayn't be nowhar."

Jack saw that it was useless to parley longer, so he turned and walked away.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE FEVER SWAMP.

"Humph, I've heard of the swamps, and I expected to find something bad when I found them, but this beats my fancy clear out of sight," and Jack stopped to give one despairing glance around him. "Here's where the road leaves the river, and here's where I leave the road, and when we shall ever come together again is more than I can tell. A man who lives and travels is always finding something new, something better or something worse than he ever saw before, but in the latter respect I think I have undoubtedly capped the climax, and though I were to travel the world over, I would hardly find anything to excel, or even equal, this."

It was, indeed, a sorry prospect. A low, flat bottom thickly studded with cottonwood shrubs, intertwined with willows and dogwoods and hazel bushes, and all matted and bound together with a profusion of wild vines of every conceivable variety and species.

Talk about a horse getting through it. A Newfoundland dog could not have made his way through, and even a rabbit would have experienced enough difficulties to have thoroughly discouraged him from making a second attempt.

Added to this was the slough of stagnant water that stood over all the ground with the thick green scum that made the very air poisonous.

The only things that seemed to thrive there were the rank vegetation, the myriads of frogs that made day and night hideous with their continual croaking, and the millions of gallinippers that hummed about in a half-famished state, ready to pounce upon and suck the last drop of blood from any poor victim who chanced to fall in their way.

It was far into the afternoon when he at last came to a point where a halt was inevitable.

Before him lay a slough of mud and water, extending from the river to the mountain, and about one hundred yards in width, void of trees, but thick set with grass.

To cross it was simply an impossibility, as he found out after making several futile attempts, and so finding himself thwarted in his efforts to reach the moonshiners' den by that course, Jack

turned to retrace his steps, and had gone a little way when his attention was attracted by the sound of a voice not far away.

Hastening forward as best he could, he shortly came out into a small cleared spot in the center of which stood a small cabin.

"Great Scott!" he mentally ejaculated, "is it possible that anybody lives in such a place as this?"

Going up to the house he was met by a little, shriveled, dried-up old man, who looked so dejected and helpless, as to render him an object of pity and compassion.

His voice was so weak that it sounded childish, as also did that of his wife, who, too, had the appearance of having been for years the victim of ague and mosquitoes.

"Could you furnish me a bite of dinner?" Jack asked.

"Dunno," the man said, in a listless tone. "Hain't nothin' much in the house."

"A very little will answer," Jack replied.

The little was set before him and Jack began to eat, but soon a sensation of sickness crept over him, and in a short time he was compelled to lie down.

The sickness increased, and within an hour his body was burning hot with fever, while his head was full of sharp, cutting pains.

"You ain't ust to sich lan's as this," the old woman said, as she went listlessly about, making such pretenses as her little remaining energy would permit toward administering to Jack's wants. "It's powerful hard on them as hain't got ust ter it as we hev, an' it takes years to git ust ter it."

"I have overexerted myself," Jack replied. "It was so hot and the way was so difficult that I overtaxed my strength."

"Then you've been sick afore, hev ye?"

"Yes, only last week."

"Then you orten't a-never undertook this. You 'mind me some, mister, ov the feller who come here 'bout a year ago an' who tuck jest as you air an' come scan'lous nigh a-dyin'. You look heap like 'im. He was awful bad tuck, an' fer days was outen his head, an' kep' a-goin' on powerful 'bout one thing an' t'other, a-ravin' an' a-chargin' all the time. 'Peared like from what I could gather that he'd been havin' a awful time over in them mountings someway, though he wuz that crazy that they warn't scarcely no sense in nothin' he said. I tell ye he had er mouty tough spell ov it, an' it's a wonder he ever got through with a particle o' breath in 'im, an' I kin tell ye he didn't have no more'n that. Nine men out o' ten 'ud o' died under ther circumstances, an' you're so much like 'im in the way you're tuck."

With this highly comforting assurance ringing in his ears, Jack dropped into a state of unconsciousness, while his fever grew higher and stronger, and his whole form became racked with pain.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

IN THE HANDS OF THE ENEMY.

Ten days had elapsed since Jack left Fifer's, and Lizzie had grown restless and uneasy, or rather the uneasy feelings that had haunted her from the first had grown to such an alarming degree as to deprive her of all rest.

For three days and nights she had hardly eaten or slept, and a pale, melancholy look began to settle down over her features.

It was early in the morning of the tenth day when she arose and dressed herself preparatory to going away.

"Whut's up 'uth ye now, gal?" Fifer asked, noting her preparations. "Whut yer got in mind?"

"I'm going up in the mountains," she replied, with a quiet firmness that showed that her mind was made up and that no amount of persuasion, however eloquent, could change it.

"Goin' ter hunt fer that feller?"

"Yes, I am. Something has happened to him, or he would have come back before now. He may be hurt again, or perhaps those scoundrels have killed him."

"Wal, now, as fer that, it may be all so jest as you say. But, by Jacks, it's a monstrous lot o' foolishness fer you ter go ter runnin' resks when it hain't goin' ter do no good. I tell ye it air so. Ef ther feller's hurt, why, ther chances air ten to one agin' you findin' uv 'im, an' ef he's kilt, which is more likely, why, in co'se, that ends it fer him, an' ef he's got scairt out an' skipped fer home, which I take it is the most likely of all, why, that ends it fer you. So whut's the sense in you packin' up an' pikin' off up in them derned ole mountings jes' fer the sake o'

gittin' yerself killed er carried off by them danged rascals? They hain't none, by Jacks!"

"Maybe not, uncle," Lizzie replied, with determined calmness; "but I'm going."

After making a few preparations, Lizzie announced her readiness to go.

Jim Fifer looked at her in wonder and admiration, as she stood for a moment in the bright sunlight, her face lighted up with the fire of resolution, and her eyes sparkling with a queer mixture of gentleness and daring.

He felt that, though docile and quiet as she was, she was a dangerous person to wake up in anger.

In short, he looked upon her that morning as a girl to be loved and feared—a girl who would submit to anything that was right, but who would submit to nothing that was wrong.

"She's a curious critter," he admitted, "a doggoned quare gal, by Jacks!"

Then he watched her as she walked away—watched her until she climbed the mountain path, and was still watching her when she reached the summit, and turned back to wave him a farewell.

And when she disappeared from sight, he dropped his gaze, saying:

"A doggoned quare gal, by Jacks!"

Lizzie went back by the road that she and Jack had traveled that day they came down to Fifer's.

It was her intention to visit Rowhuff's Glen, and to that end she directed her course, keeping a sharp watch as she went along for the point where they had come into the road that morning when they left the cave.

Accordingly, before leaving Fifer's she had resolved to make that the first point she visited.

After passing some distance along the mountainside, she halted at a point that she felt sure was the place where they had separated from Jerry Jenkins, and where she must turn off from the road in order to reach the glen and the cave.

It did not look quite familiar, yet she remembered that she was frustrated and excited that morning, and that, perhaps, after all, she had not noted the surroundings very closely.

There was a dimly-marked path leading off in the right direction, and it was the first and only path she had discovered so far along her way, and besides she had come about the proper distance, so she reasoned, it must be the proper place to turn off.

Without further hesitancy or doubt she left the road and plunged into the dark forest, and for an hour followed the path that led on into the broken mountains, now winding about through the huge boulders that lay thickly along the mountain crest, and again following up or down some small ravine that had forced its way through the stones.

At the end of an hour's ramble the path ran out, and Lizzie found herself in a narrow cave between two mountain ranges, with a steep precipice on one side and only a narrow opening on the other by which she had found an ingress to the cave.

"I have lost my way," she said to herself as she came to a halt, finding it impossible to proceed a step farther.

Directly she began to retrace her course by the circuitous, meandering path, and after several turns came to the top of the mountain.

For hours she tramped about, and then it was quite dark, and she was about to sink down once more in hopeless despair, when her eyes happened to catch the glimmering of a small spark of light through a clump of trees.

For an instant she hailed the discovery with delight, and then there came a feeling of fear to her heart, and she hesitated, undecided whether to go forward and seek the source of the light, or to fly from the spot.

While she stood thus in uncertainty a heavy hand clutched her shoulder, and a voice at her ear cried out:

"Curse you, be quiet, or I'll shoot you!"

Surprised and shocked as she was, Lizzie attempted to scream, but another heavy hand was placed over her mouth, and she found herself powerless in the man's grasp, and, after making several futile attempts to escape him, she was forced to permit herself to be dragged along in the direction from whence the light had come.

They soon reached the little log cabin, and when her captor had rudely pushed her through the open door, he followed and closed the door after him.

"Now sit down thar," the man said, pointing to a rude bench that stood against the wall.

Lizzie, for the time overawed by the sense of her situation, obeyed without a murmur.

Then the man laid his pistol down in his lap, holding it with his hand, and went on:

"I 'low ye don't know me, but I know you mouty well, an' to my sorrer. That's whar I got the advantage uv ye, an, as I don't keer to hold no advantage over ye, I want ter give yer a chance ter git erquainted 'uth me. I been er waitin' ter see ye fer er long time, an' I've been er keepin' er lookout fer ye when I wuz knockin' 'bout, but I wuz 'bout ter give ye up as lost when ye wuz good ernuff ter come to me."

The man stopped, and his snaky eyes blazed and sparkled as he sat with his gaze riveted on the girl. Once or twice she glanced toward him, but seeing the sinister expression on his face, and the insolent, triumphant smile that lurked about his mouth, let her eyes drop to the floor, and sat nervously twitching her hands.

"Reckon you don't rickollect nothin' 'bout the time when we met last," he went on, "an' fer that matter I 'low mebbly yer don't call ter mind ever seein' me er tall. Do ye?"

"I have no recollection of ever seeing you," the girl replied.

"Don't eh? I 'lowed mebbly not. Wal, I hain't fergot 'bout seein' you, ner I hain't likely to soon, lemme tell ye. Say, d'yer see that air hand?" and as the man spoke he held up a hand that showed plainly the effects of a bad wound.

The girl nodded in the affirmative.

"Wal, yer kin see that air hand hes hed er hurt, I reckon?"

Lizzie nodded again.

"Now, kin yer guess how an' whar I got that hurt?"

"No, I can't."

"I 'lowed as like as not yer'd done clean fergot it. What 'ud yer think ef I wuz ter say a gal shot that han'? Would yer think I wuz lyin'?"

Lizzie made no reply, and doubtless the truth was beginning to dawn on her.

"An' ef I wuz ter say that you know the gal that done it," he continued, "would yer say I wuz lyin'? An' ef I wuz ter say you done it, would yer say it warn't so? Hey?"

Lizzie said nothing, and the man continued:

"Now ye know whar an' when I got that air hand crippled up—it war that night up to old Tucker's when we come arter that darned spy. You done it, an', my gal, you got ter pay fer it."

By this time Lizzie was beginning to recover her composure, and listened to the man until he was through, then asked:

"How?"

"How?" he repeated. "Wal, you'll soon know how. Git yerself ready ter go 'uth me ter Hank Duncan's still. Yer wanted thar, an' when yer git thar yer'll find out how yer ter pay fer yer work ergin us fellers who air a tryin' ter git er honest livin' an' who air continually hounded by them derved spies. Git up and git ready ter go."

"I am not going," the girl replied, quietly but firmly.

"Yer hain't?"

"No."

"Then we'll see 'bout it."

And the man advanced toward her with a terrible look on his face.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A MYSTERIOUS SHOT.

"Stop!"

There was a flash of fire in the girl's eyes, and an expression of determined resolution on her face as she stood up before the man and pronounced the one word, that for an instant he quailed and obeyed her command.

"Come one step nearer, or but lay the weight of a finger on me, and you do it at your own peril."

"Ha-a-aw," the man laughed. "Yer talk big fer a gal."

"Yes; and I mean what I say."

"Reckon yer hain't very dangerous," he replied, at the same time advancing a step toward her.

In an instant he found himself gazing into the barrel of a pistol, and as he saw the flashing eyes of the girl behind it he fell back.

"Clear the road," she cried. "Take that seat over there, and keep it until I pass out, and don't you dare to stir unless you want to forfeit your life."

Advancing to the table, she took the man's pistol from it, and

going to the door threw it as far as she could into the woods, and immediately following she disappeared among the trees and the thick darkness.

Once outside the girl ran for life, heedless of where she went or in what direction, unmindful of all other danger in the remembrance of that from which she was fleeing.

On and on she flew, over stones and logs, up hill and down, until at length, completely tired out and exhausted, she sank down at the foot of a large tree, and finally fell into a deep sleep.

When she awoke it was daylight, and the sky overhead was clear and bright.

She realized that it would be useless to attempt to find Row-huff's Glen, since she had no idea in what direction it lay, so she determined to try to find her way back to the road.

Late in the afternoon, just between sundown and dark, she came out to the edge of a precipice that fell down perpendicularly to a depth of almost a hundred feet and ended in the Meramec River.

As far as she could see in both directions the precipice continued, and she was at a loss what to do, or how to proceed.

It was at a point in the mountains new to her, and she had no idea in what direction to go to reach the road she had left the morning of the day before, nor had she any idea of how far she had wandered from it.

She was standing on the brink of the precipice, lost in thought, when a man approached from behind, and skulking through the woods, dodging from tree to tree, continued to draw nearer to her position.

Unmindful of any presence near, and little dreaming of danger, Lizzie removed her bonnet, and seating herself on a large stone, leaned back to let the cool evening breeze fan her hot, throbbing brow.

For half an hour she remained thus, and all the time the figure in the rear kept flitting from tree to tree, silently but surely stealing upon her, until it reached a position within a few feet of her, and like a tiger preparing to spring upon its unsuspecting prey, the man crouched to make a swift lunge at the poor girl and hold her secure in his iron grasp.

For a moment he hesitated, then like a cat leaped forward, and had almost secured the prize when the report of a gun broke the stillness of the night and echoed and re-echoed through the forest, and in that same instant the girl looked around to find her pursuer lying at her feet weltering in blood.

CHAPTER XXX.

JACK GETS HIS TEMPER UP.

Jack had a severe spell of fever, but recovered sufficiently within a week to be able to get back to Jackson's.

His first thought was of Lizzie, and knowing that she would suffer untold agony of suspense on account of his long absence, he resolved to go at once to Fifer's and acquaint her with all that had transpired, and then return again to the mountains to take up the prosecution of his work.

So it came about that at noon of the second day after Lizzie's departure, Jack rode up to Fifer's house and dismounted to enter, when Fifer came out. There was a look of troubled astonishment on the old man's face that was too apparent not to be observed, and Jack felt that something had gone wrong. Thus, for a little while the two men stood, each waiting for the other to speak. Jack was the first to break the silence, and he asked:

"How is Lizzie, Mr. Fifer?"

The old man shook his head. Jack became alarmed, and advancing a few steps nearer, said:

"Nothing has happened, has there?"

"I dunno," Fifer replied. "The gal's gone up in them mountings an' orter 'a' come back last night, an' she hain't come yit. I dunno what's happened to keep 'er. Must be somethin', though."

Jack succeeded after a time in getting the whole story from Fifer.

Without another word he remounted, and heading his horse for the mountain, dashed away at full speed, muttering as he went:

"Those rascals have caught her, and knowing how she has favored me, they have killed her, or—which would be a thousand times worse—have carried her a prisoner to their den."

For once the shrewd, cautious young man allowed his impetuosity to get the better of his discretion, and as he spurred his horse on, a settled, determined expression came to his face, and his eyes flashed with the fire of defiance.

"There'll be no more foolishness about this business," he muttered. "I'll go straight to the den of those black-hearted scoundrels and have it out with them."

And he meant every word of it.

Without stopping to consider that he was but one against many, and that fortified as they were he would practically have no chance with them, he spurred his horse forward, and was soon up the mountain and following the path leading over toward Perry Jackson's.

After a long, hard ride, sometimes along a narrow pass, above a yawning abyss, and sometimes through caverns dark and deep, Jack finally came out into a small clearing, which he recognized as the spot where he had first met Lige Jones.

"This is the path that leads to the den," he muttered, as he halted momentarily. "I followed it that night through the darkness and the storm, and I can follow it again."

So saying he whirled his horse about and dashed on, never stopping to consider the danger he was running nor the little hope he had of being able to render the girl any assistance if she was in the hands of the moonshiners.

After going a mile or so he found it necessary to bring his horse to a slower gait, since the way became so rough and rugged as to render his progress almost impossible.

The road faded out, and often he ran between huge stones, making it difficult for his horse to pass.

Yet he went on as rapidly as he could, his ardor not a particle cooled and his resolution unshaken, until eventually he reached a point beyond which his horse could not pass. Hastily dismounting, he secured his steed, and started on afoot.

Another half hour brought him to the well-remembered spot, and once more he stood at the entrance of the moonshiners' cave.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

When Lizzie glanced around, on hearing the report of a gun and seeing a man fall at her feet, she was surprised to see Jerry Jenkins flying from the spot as if pursued by ten thousand furies. He had thrown his gun down, and in the excitement of the moment lost his hat, and in the mad race he was making presented anything but a brave appearance.

"Jerry, Jerry," the girl called.

But Jerry either did not hear or did not heed, and on he went through the brush and timber, intent only on putting the greatest possible amount of space, in the least possible amount of time, between the dread scene and himself.

Five minutes passed, and Lizzie began to think that Jerry was gone for good, yet all she had power to do was to stand there with her eyes fixed on the form of the man at her feet. She could not move, could not cry out, and could not tear her gaze from the horrible sight.

"My God," she thought, "if I am found here with him, what will be the result to me? I must fly, fly!"

So saying, she was just starting away when the sound of approaching footsteps reached her ears, and an instant later Lige Jones emerged from the woods leading Jerry Jenkins unwillingly to the spot where the shooting had occurred.

"Whar is it now?" Lige demanded.

"Right thar ferinst ye," Jerry replied.

"I don't see nothin'."

"Here, here!" Lizzie called.

Jones looked in the right direction then, and seeing Lizzie and the prostrate form, came forward, dragging Jerry after him. Coming up quite close to the girl, he asked:

"Who is he?"

"I don't know," Lizzie said in reply. "His face is hidden, you see."

"Yas, I see. Wonder ef he's drapped fer good?"

In order to assure himself on this point Lige rolled the man over.

"Shucks," he went on, "he hain't nigh put out yit. Jest kin'er stunned. I reckon, an' ll come 'round all right after a little. Jes' needs a little water an' breath ter set 'im er talkin'. Fetch some water, Jerry, an' be sorter spry 'bout it."

Now that it was settled that he had not actually killed the man, Jerry's scare passed off and he began to feel brave again.

Lizzie had all this time stood aloof, looking on the wounded man's face. As soon as he was turned to the light she recognized him as the man whose prisoner she had been the night before, and who was known to her by name as Dave Cobb. She realized now that he had been following and hunting her from the time she bolted from his cabin.

"How did yer happen ter be here, Jerry?" Jones asked.

"Been huntin', an' jest happened ter pass here at ther nick o' time, an' secin' that feller makin' fer ther girl, I turned ole Betsey loose on 'im an' drapped 'im. Tell yer whut, Lige, 'tain't healthy ter fool 'uth ther ole gal when she 'gins ter squall. She goes in to fetch blood, an' she fetches it. She's er bad 'un ter stan' up agin'."

"Is he bad hurt?" Lizzie asked when Jones had examined Dave Cobb's wounds.

"No, not very much, I judge," Lige replied. "Jest got a charge o' bird-shot in his back, an' I 'low he'll git over it soon ernuff."

"If he gits over it ertall it'll be soon ernuff, an' er blamed sight too soon, I reckon," Jerry said. "He's one o' them derved moonshine gang, an' ort a be finished while he's started on the road."

"But we hain't no right ter finish 'im, Jerry, no matter whut he is er who he is. We hain't got no call ter up an' lay ourselves liable fer murder jest becase this yere onnery cuss ort a be killed. Then whut air we goin' ter do 'uth 'im? That's ther question?"

"Dunno, lessen we throw 'im over ther bank inter ther river."

"Kain't do that, fer that 'ud be murder, yer know."

"Looky yere, Lige, me'n ole Betsey drapped that feller, didn't we?"

"I reckon."

"Wal, now, if he gits well, er ever gits a chance in any way, hain't he mouty liable ter tell all about this yere scrimmage, an' hain't I mouty liable ter hev that whole set o' moonshiners a-scurin' the woods for me an' a-huntin' ov me down?"

"Reckon ye air."

"An' don't it 'pear purty doggoned plain to you that if they ketch me it'll be all day fer me an' ole Betsey, an' that they won't be no talkin' an' hummin' an' hawin' one way an' ernuther 'bout it?"

"Guess yer figger'n 'bout right thar."

"Then don't it stan' ter reason that somethin' ort a be done 'uth that air feller? Somethin' that 'ud sorter cut him off frum the gang, an' fix 'im so's he couldn't do no harm?"

"Wal, fer your safety they ort, Jerry, that's a fack. But how kin we do it 'thout committin' a murder? An' yer know that's a goldarned bad thing ter do. Now, hain't it?"

"Yas, it air, Lige; but yer ort to b'ar in mind that it hain't no funny thing ter be hunted down an' killed, as I will be ef he gits er chance ter tell on me."

"Wal, o' one thin' I'm purty doggoned sartin, an' that is this: It ain't nowise safe fer us ter stan' here an' argy over this business; fer the fust thing we know somebody'll ketch us here, an' then we'll all be in ter it. We got ter do somethin', an' do it purty doggoned quick; but I dunno what it had best be. What d'yer think, Bet?"

"Yas, Bet," echoed Jerry, "what d'yer think 'ud be best?"

CHAPTER XXXII.

JACK'S BRAVE FIGHT.

Lizzie had no need to answer the question, for scarcely had it been asked when a pistol shot rang out clear and sharp on the evening air, and that was followed immediately by another.

"What does that mean?" Lizzie gasped.

"Whar is it?" Jerry inquired.

In the meantime Lige Jones leaned out as far as possible over the bank, and stood staring down to the river. Directly two more shots were exchanged, and Lige Jones, springing back, said:

"It's him, it's him, an' they're onto him red-hot."

"Who, who?" Lizzie demanded.

"Why, that Jack feller. He's found ther moonshine den down thar, I 'low, an' he's got inter it with 'em."

"My God! they'll kill him, they'll kill him!" the girl cried, wringing her hands.

"Reckon some o' them'll go fust," Jones replied, starting off down the bank at a rapid pace in search of a place to descend.

"Whar's ole Betsey?" Jerry demanded, tearing about excitedly. "The ole gal'll want er word ter say in this ere scrimmage, an' when she speaks somethin's goin' ter drap."

Lige Jones was gone from view in a moment, and while Jerry tore about in search of his gun, Lizzie began to search for a place where she could descend to where Jack was fighting such an uneven battle with the moonshiners.

Once there were three or four shots in rapid succession, and Jerry, stopping a moment to peer over the cliff, dodged back, muttering:

"One uv 'em's done fer, by jingo, fer I seed 'im tumble inter the river, but they're gittin' too many fer Jack an'll soon do 'im. Whar's Betsey? The ole gal needs ter do some gabbin' to them fellers jest now."

At that moment Dave Cobb sprang up, and attempting to stand on his feet, staggered back and went down the precipice right in the midst of his friends and comrades.

This unlooked-for advent momentarily surprised and disconcerted the moonshiners and saved Jack's life, for the falling body fell upon and knocked down one of the men, who, at that moment, had drawn a bead on Jack, and was in the act of pulling the trigger, when he was struck and laid senseless on the ground.

This event decided the contest, for already Hank Duncan had gone down the precipice and into the river with a bullet through his heart, and one other had received a severe wound that had stretched him out in a condition of perfect harmlessness.

Dave Cobb was dead, and the man he had collided with in his downward fall was past fighting, so that only three men remained to keep up the contest, and they being natural cowards, gave up the fight and fled into the cave.

Jack placed handcuffs on the two men who lay outside, and then, overcome, sank down at the door of the cave, and passed quickly into unconsciousness.

Lige Jones was by his side, and in a moment Bet and Jerry came, too.

They found, upon examination, that Jack had received two wounds, one in the left arm—a mere flesh wound that had only affected him by causing a considerable loss of blood, and the other a mere scratch on the right side of his body.

Lizzie did not fall on his breast and weep as she so longed to do, but instead, set to work to revive him.

"Bring some water," she commanded, and Jerry bounded away to obey, while she bound articles of clothing about the arm to stay the flow of blood.

Lige Jones, in the meantime, had taken the precaution to securely fasten the strong door to the cave, thus making himself sure of the three men who were prisoners within.

By the way, if those people who so often referred to Lige as Lazy Jones could have seen the cool, calm and energetic manner in which he acted that night, they would doubtless never more have used that obnoxious appellation when speaking of him.

He proved himself, though not a dashing, a brave, orderly man, and to him the final breaking up of the moonshine outlaws of the Ozarks is greatly due.

The flow of blood once stopped, and a liberal bathing in cold water soon brought Jack around again, and his mind was as clear as ever, though his limbs were almost too weak to support his weight.

"Are they all safe?" he asked, as he glanced around.

"Yas, all safe," Jones answered. "These fellers out yere air tied up all right 'nuff, an' them in thar hain't likely ter cut no figger now. They're locked in tight an' fast."

"Then, thank Heaven," Jack said, reverently, "the fight is over, and the moonshiners of the Ozark Mountains are brought to bay."

"And you are safe," Lizzie added.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

CONCLUSION.

Having assured himself that his work in regard to the moonshiners was complete, Jack turned his attention to his friends, and asked for an explanation of the circumstances that brought them all together so opportunely and unexpectedly.

In a few words Lizzie related her experiences in the mountains during the past thirty-six hours, and ended by recounting the incidents of the meeting on the edge of the cliff, in which Jerry and Lige Jones figured.

"Lizzie must be taken away from here, and the officials must be notified," said Jack. "Suppose Jerry takes my horse and goes with Lizzie to Jackson's, and, leaving her there, rides on down to town for help. He can go and come in three or four hours, and while he is gone we can hold things in proper shape here."

"That's er sensible scheme," was Jones' comment, "an' Jerry'd best be hustlin' ter once."

"But I won't go," Lizzie said, when appealed to. "Your plan is all right, but I shall stay here until you go away, Jack. I won't go and leave you."

After a little further reasoning and argument, Jack allowed the girl to have her own way, and sent Jerry away with a note to the doctor who had visited Lizzie when she was hurt, and who was the only person in the town that Jack knew aught of and was willing to trust with so important a matter.

In the note a brief statement of matters as they stood, was made, and the doctor was urged to send aid at once to assist in completing the work of taking and conveying the moonshiners from the mountains.

Jerry was further instructed to stop at Jackson's on his way down, and leave word for old Perry to come at once with some provisions.

This order was made for Lizzie's benefit, for she had not eaten anything for two days and a night, and was borne up by excitement alone.

It was easy to account for the timely arrival of Jerry Jenkins on the spot that evening, since he spent the day hunting down the river, and was on his way home, when he saw Dave Cobb making an effort to capture Lizzie Tucker.

Lige Jones spent a good portion of his time hunting, and almost every day for years he had passed and repassed within sight of the den without ever once having a suspicion that it was anywhere near.

He happened to be close when Jerry discharged old Betsey to such good effect, and hearing the report started forward in the direction from whence it came, and had gone but a few steps, when Jerry ran into his arms.

All this was explained before Jerry moved away to fulfill his mission, for he was determined that Betsey should receive her mead of praise.

"You have done well, Jerry," Jack said, "and you and Betsey deserve great credit."

"Bet yer hide, mister, ole Betsey gits thar when she talks. Thar hain't no foolishness 'bouten ther ole gal, an' when she speaks somethin' has got ter drap."

With this parting speech Jerry strode away, and a minute or so later they heard him galloping off down the mountain.

About an hour after Jerry's departure Perry Jackson arrived with a bucket of cooked provisions, and cautiously approached the cave, as if he wasn't fully decided whether Jerry's story was altogether true, and whether or not there might not yet be danger from the moonshiners.

"Hed er powerful scrimmage here, I jedge from the looks o' things. Hain't bad hurt yerself, I hope?" said Jackson as he entered.

"No, a slight wound or two," Jack replied, "and they'll soon heal up."

"Glad uv it, mister, doggone my skin ef I hain't. Yer a purty doggoned plucky sort o' chap, now, hain't yer? Never had no idee o' yer ever runnin' them fellers down, but s'pected every day that they'd do you dead'n nothin'. Goshamity, but I'd a hated ter a un'ertuck that air job."

By this time the two wounded men, with whom Lige Jones had been at work, were so far revived as to be conscious of what was going on, and knowing that they were trapped beyond all hope of release, showed an anxious disposition to shift the responsibility of their crimes to the shoulders of their comrades.

The hours wore on, and away toward midnight the clatter of horses' hoofs was heard up the river, and Jack, turning to his companion, remarked:

"They are coming, and in a short time we shall be through with our work, and I am glad of it."

"Then we will go away from the mountains for good and

forever?" Lizzie asked in a low tone, as she leaned against Jack for support.

"Yes, we will bid good-by to the Ozark Mountains forever," Jack answered, drawing her nearer to him.

Directly the men rode up, and the doctor was with them. He came forward at once, and taking Jack by the hand, exclaimed:

"I am glad of the opportunity to help you, my friend, and I congratulate you on your success in ridding this section of the greatest curse that ever any section of country suffered from. You have done much for us and we are glad to aid you in it."

"Then let your men take these prisoners safely to jail, where they may be kept and cared for until they have had a fair trial."

The three men in the cave, knowing that they could no longer resist, were glad of an opportunity to surrender, and when the door was opened they marched out, and were handcuffed preparatory to making the trip to the county seat, where they were taken and duly lodged before morning.

The doctor remained with Jack at Perry Jackson's and attended to his wounds. Jerry also went there, insisting that he and old Betsey didn't propose to give up the field until the smoke of the battle had finally cleared away, showing that the victory was perfect and complete in every respect.

It was almost a week before Jack was enough recovered to undertake the trip down to the railroad, and in the meantime Lizzie was his nurse, staying by him and waiting on him like a devoted worshiper.

Jerry had spent a great part of the time there, only toward the last it was noticed that he and Sal were together quite frequently, and that often Jerry assisted her in hoeing, and sometimes of evenings they were seen sitting in very suspicious attitudes down by the river bank.

Every day the doctor came to see his patient, and at last one day he came accompanied by another gentleman of a clerical appearance. In fact, he was a clergyman, and he came on business.

Pretty soon after the arrival of these two gentlemen, Jim Fifer came, in answer to a summons sent by Jack, and the result of the whole business was a wedding, wherein Jack and Lizzie figured as the parties chiefly interested.

This marriage, when over, was followed in short order by another, in which Jerry and Sal became man and wife, to everybody's satisfaction, and especially so to Jack and Lizzie, who rejoiced to see Jerry thus provided for.

That afternoon Jack and his new wife bade good-by to their friends, and in company with the minister and the doctor left the Ozarks for the railroad, in order to take the first train for Jack's home.

It was a beautiful, clear day, and as they passed down the valley road by the river bank, listening to the sweet music of the birds and the waters, neither talked much, both being busy with thoughts of the past and the future.

When late in the afternoon they reached the last "rise" in the road, beyond which they passed out of sight of the mountains, they halted and looked back on the Ozarks, that lay way off to the north like great piles of blue clouds standing up against the sky. A long time they gazed in silence, and neither of them spoke. Then turning, they rode on and passed out of sight of the Ozark Mountains forever.

THE END.

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